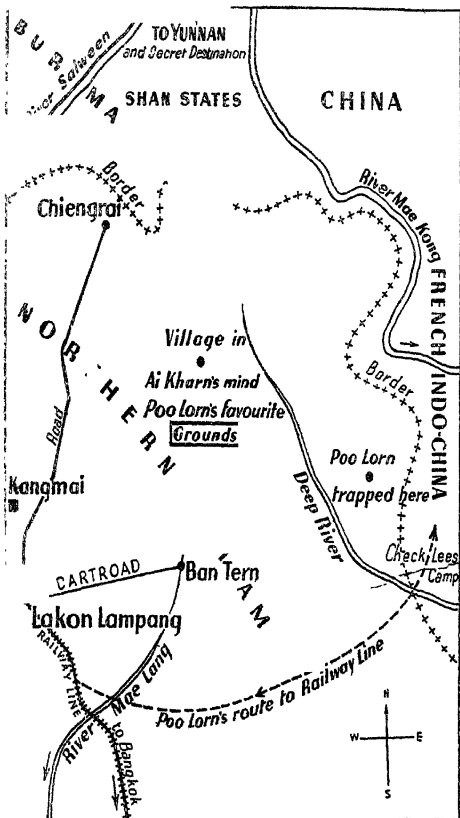


THE PILOT BOOKS

POO LORN OF THE ELEPHANTS



Map illustrating the scene of Poo Lorn's activities

Note.—The map is not to scale, and some of the places and rivers named are imaginary.

POO LORN OF THE ELEPHANTS

by
REGINALD CAMPBELL

EDITED AND ABRIDGED FOR CLASS USE
WITH THE APPROVAL OF THE AUTHOR

Illustrated by
C. J. AMBLER

UNIVERSITY OF LONDON PRESS LTD.
10 & 11 WARWICK LANE, LONDON, E.C.4

Price Re. 1-4-0

FIRST PRINTED JULY 1937

REPRINTED IN INDIA
BY LONGMANS, GREEN & CO. LTD.
BY ARRANGEMENT WITH THE
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON PRESS, LTD.

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PRINTED IN INDIA AT THE DIOCESAN PRESS, MADRAS (P.I.C. NO. Q.H.
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20-7-1946—C2380

ABOUT THIS BOOK'

It is always reassuring, particularly when, like *Poo Lorn of the Elephants*, a book deals with strange and out-of-the way matters, to know that the author has a large first-hand experience of his subject. That is true of Reginald Campbell, who probably knows more about elephants and their habits and minds than anyone else who has ever written about them.

Leaving Berkhamsted School just before the War, he served in the Navy until 1919, when he resigned his commission to put into practice his main ambition, which was, like Cairns's in the story, to get to know the Far East, and particularly the jungle, at close quarters. As forest Assistant to a British firm leasing Siamese teak Forests, he began living the story which he has told in *Teak Wallah*. For five years, during which the jungle was almost his only home, a tent his house, and coolies and timber-working elephants his companions, he escaped the more dramatic dangers of wild beasts and snakes, his own elephants, and once being lost without food for thirty hours; but at last dysentery and malaria drove him to England for a cure. He returned East against doctor's orders, but eventually had to give up for good in 1924.

He then turned author. Reading this slightly shortened version of *Poo Lorn of the Elephants*, one quickly understands why his stories and novels have been translated into many languages, and two of them into Braille for blind readers.

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PART I

CHAPTER I

CONCERNING THE EARLIER LIFE OF POO LORN

Poo LORN the Terrible, his work over for the day, brooded alone in the teak forest. Round his great forelegs were iron hobbles which prevented him from straying too far from the humans he both served and hated.

This hatred, implanted in his fierce soul since he had been a tiny "butcha" elephant, had of late doubled in intensity, for nameless instincts were urging him to make a long journey to the north.

Poo Lorn rapped his trunk against the ground, swished with ears and tail his formidable neck and body, and strove fruitlessly to rend apart his hobbles. The iron links bit into his flesh, and he rumbled and bubbled with wrath. Why had he been kept in bondage for all these years, when other elephants roamed free and wild through the jungle ranges?

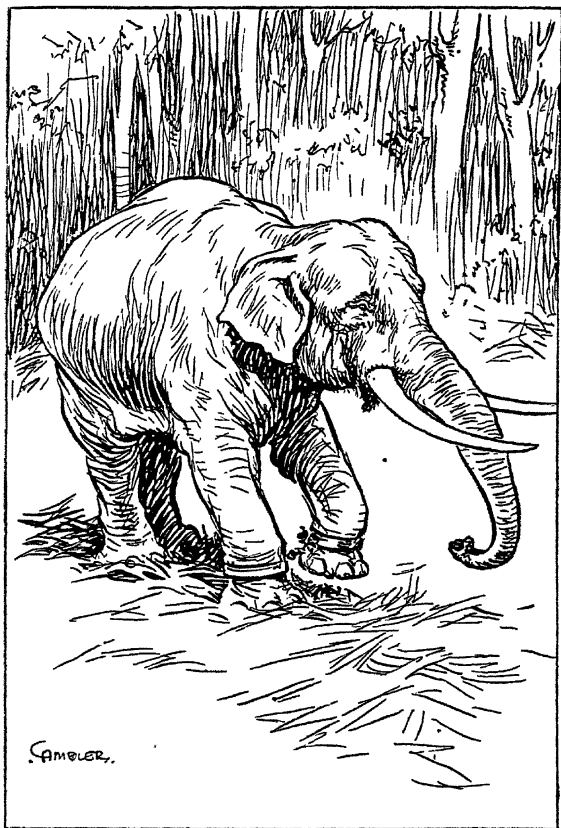
Many seasons had passed, so it seemed to him, since he had been broken in to harness.

Though he did not remember her now, Poo Lorn's first friend had been his gentle mother, who had worked for the same teak company of which he himself was now the slave. During his first five years, when he had run unfettered at her side, she had been his sole protection from all danger, and neither by day nor by night had he ever ventured far from her. By day, when she pushed the teak logs down the forest hills into the swirling rivers

below, she would shield him from the heavy baulks of timber that might crush his little body. Sometimes he even accompanied her when she plunged into the thrumming jungle streams to clear a jam of logs. Squealing with fright, and caught by the eddying currents, he would bounce from one elephant to another, but ever his mother's trunk found him and pulled him back to safety.

At night, when the forest was alive with danger, she was his sure safeguard against the yellow ghosts with amber eyes that rippled through the wilderness and stabbed the heart with fear. . . .

There were evenings at this period when the company elephants were brought into the compound of the great white lord who ruled them. Little Poo Lorn, lurking beneath his mother, would watch furtively for the white man to approach. The white man, on seeing him, would smile and offer him a handful of the sticky crushed tamarind that he loved. Prompted by a gentle rumble of approval from his mother, Poo Lorn would run to the outstretched hand. The hand would give the morsel, then playfully slap him on his tiny curling trunk, whereupon Poo Lorn would trumpet shrilly and shuffle quickly back to his protector. This happened time and again, and always the white man laughed, as did the dusky Lao mahouts and chainmen. They little thought that a day would come when Poo Lorn would stalk the land, a gigantic nightmare of death: that at the very mention of his name the inhabitants of every jungle village in Siam from Chiengrai to Utaradit would bow themselves in fear: that Poo Lorn would cut the main arteries of the life-blood of two nations: that at sight of him men, women and children would flee as from a pestilence; but Poo Lorn the Terrible was little in those days.



Round his great forelegs were iron hobbles.

When he was three years old he began to be aware that he was as big as, if not bigger than, the men-animals all round him. He took a delight in chasing the coolies and chainmen who tied the dragging-chains to his mother; and the men would run, laughing, then pelt him with stones till he desisted. Once he even tried to chase the great white lord, but the great white lord was a large man and armed with a heavy stick. With this stick he thwacked Poo Lorn on the root of the trunk, and Poo Lorn left the boss alone in future.

Thus, between grazing and playing, passed the first five years of Poo Lorn's life. Then, on one never-to-be-forgotten day, a large company of coolies, all carrying ropes, approached him, and with them came the white man. His gentle mother was shackled securely to a stout tree nearby, and then the trouble began.

Ropes were cast round Poo Lorn's legs, and he was thrown. He struggled desperately to his feet and charged, knocking two of his aggressors flying; but this made no difference, for his enemies seemed countless. His mother, forgetting her training, plunged frantically to come to his aid, but the shackles held her fast, so little Poo Lorn was left to fight on his own.

Bellowing and squealing, he rushed round in circles. Should he charge in one direction, some men behind him pulled him back. Should he swing round and make for them, their friends at the opposite side of the circle heaved on the ropes. Finally Poo Lorn, baffled and screaming, lay down on his side and kicked with rage.

The men paused for breath, and Noi Lah, the little Lao headman, spoke :

"Meh," said he, "never have I seen such trouble

given by a babe. I think one day Poo Lorn become a mighty big piece elephant."

John Morrison, the white manager of the teak company, nodded assent as he heard the words, but his eyes were troubled, for the breaking in of "butchas" was a cruel business. Yet there was no other way; an elephant had to be taught that man was its master, and it had to be taught by fear and fear alone.

Now in this lay tragedy, as John Morrison knew only too well. For the more an elephant struggled against its captivity, the less it was likely to survive. The weak, submitting docilely to bondage, soon recovered from the strain, but many of the fierce unconquerable little souls wore themselves out by constant resistance, with the result that before they were tamed they frequently died from sheer fatigue. Poo Lorn, to judge from the fight he was making, had not many days left to live.

"At it again, men," Morrison had said gruffly, "and get the business over and done with."

The struggles were renewed. Poo Lorn was dragged inch by inch towards a small natural clearing in the forest. This clearing, being close to a village, was comparatively free from tigers, and in it four posts had been sunk in the ground. To these, after hours of terrific toil, they pushed Poo Lorn into place, and secured him with a leg tied to each post. After that, having placed fodder and water within reach of his trunk, they left him.

The day died. Night fell. Poo Lorn was terribly lonely. Never a morsel of the fodder did he touch; instead, for hour after hour he swayed and lurched and strove against his bonds, and for hour after hour he cried for his mother. She, still tethered to the tree, heard his wails and bellowed back in anguish, but they could only plunge and call.

In the morning John Morrison hastened to the clearing. He glanced at the untouched fodder, then watched the squeaking struggling infant.

"You poor little devil," he said after a pause. "But I *had* to do it. If only you'd eat . . ."

On the second day Morrison was desperate. Poo Lorn was still feebly struggling, while the fodder remained untouched. The white man brought, pounded tamarind, sticks of sugar cane, every dainty dear to the elephantine heart, but Poo Lorn refused them all. Finally, as a last resort, Morrison caused a pail to be filled with condensed milk and water. This he left by Poo Lorn, and then he returned to his bungalow.

"We'll know by to-morrow whether the little chap will live," he told his wife.

The third morning dawned, and when Morrison arrived in the clearing he found, to his relief, that Poo Lorn had drunk the milk. There was, however, an expression in the animal's eyes that brought a lump to the white man's throat. Poo Lorn had ceased struggling and was standing, resigned and hopeless, as if all interest in life for him had ceased. Morrison, who knew the danger of a broken heart, felt guilty of the murder of a child.

Sharp orders were given to some attendant coolies, and Poo Lorn was released. He staggered a few paces, then fell. He lay very still, and more milk was brought to him. After a while he rose and stood motionless in the centre of the clearing. He showed no signs of fight; he made no move towards the luscious vegetation that grew all round; he merely drooped, broken in body and spirit.

John Morrison beckoned to his headman. "Noi Lah," said he, "this elephant shall *live*." And he gave directions that for the next four weeks, the best native elephant-doctor in the district should

be in constant attendance on Poo Lorn. During this period no orders were to be given Poo Lorn; he was merely to be hobbled and left to graze as long as he liked. The doctor was to feed him every morning and evening with arsenic tonic, bark medicine and tamarind. Should he succeed, a great reward would be his.

The doctor, an old wizened Lao, listened to his orders, then set to work. He fashioned cunning balls of medicine from the bark of a hundred different trees, and in ways known only to himself induced his patient to eat the queer dainties. Soon Poo Lorn began to fatten out, and in a month the doctor bowed low before John Morrison and claimed his reward.

A mahout was then summoned to begin Poo Lorn's training, and the mahout's first lesson was simple. He stood up on tip-toe and pressed the top of his iron-spiked goad on to Poo Lorn's back. The goad pricked, and Poo Lorn knelt to avoid the pain, whereupon the mahout scrambled on to the elephant's neck.

Thus did Poo Lorn enter the servitude of man.

There followed for Poo Lorn ten long years of howdah work, the howdahs and weights in them increasing in size as he himself grew in stature. At first, on forest tours, he carried only the tiniest of howdahs with the lightest articles of his master's camp-kit. With his trunk straight out before him, he would shuffle along the jungle glades as fast as his legs could take him, while in his heart was a terrible dread lest he should be left behind, for the two full-grown baggage elephants were thin and rangy animals. But somehow he always managed to keep up with them, and by the time he was

eleven he was able to finish a long journey feeling as fresh as any of his companions.

He then received the honour of carrying his master's heavy, double-covered tent. Poo Lorn had reason to thank this rising strength of his, for on one occasion, when hobbled at night near the white man's camp, he was attacked by a tiger. The tiger sprang at him from behind, and Poo Lorn, on feeling the tearing rasp of the claws and teeth, swung round like some gigantic kitten. The tiger, shaken off by the sudden movement, crouched, and then, with flattened ears and snarling mouth, sprang a second time and fastened itself on to the thick base of Poo Lorn's trunk.

The pain of the first attack had been nothing to what it now became. Poo Lorn, hampered though he was with hobbles round his forefeet, lurched and swayed in and out between the towering forest stems, trumpeting and bellowing in his agony. Try as he might, he could not rid himself of this clinging death, but finally sheer luck saved him. The hobbles caused him to stumble badly, and he fell forward on to his head. The great cat, its breath crushed out of it, momentarily loosed its grip, whereupon Poo Lorn stabbed it with his tusks, then pounded and kneaded it with his feet till it was flattened out of all recognition.

John Morrison, when he inspected him the following morning, looked anxious. Though the wounds themselves were not particularly deep, the danger of septic complications was very real, for the claws of any tiger are steeped in germs bred from the rotting flesh of its kills. The white man therefore decreed that the elephant should rest and remain under the care of the native doctor.

Poo Lorn gradually shook off the poison in his



blood. Then back he went to his howdah work again.

At the age of fifteen he was considered strong enough to begin his real work of dragging timber. His howdah was stowed away, and harness planted on him instead. He joined all the other big elephants of the company's force, and began to learn his new duties, which were many and varied.

At first he was clumsy, but he soon learnt the best and easiest way to tackle a log. Moreover, he almost liked the change in his life, for the terrific exertion of pulling the dead-weight logs of teak gave him something on which his ever-increasing strength could bite.

Sometimes he would be told off to work at the stumps. This entailed climbing to where the teak

trees had been felled and logged by gangs of Kamoo coolies. He would then push and prod the logs away from their stumps and down the slopes to more level ground, where chains would be fastened to him and he would drag the timber to the nearest jungle stream.

When the rains broke and these streams became roaring torrents, he would plunge down the banks, clear jam after jam of logs, and send the timber riding down the treacherous yellow currents to Bangkok, hundreds of miles away to the south. On these occasions he had no harness on him, only his mahout, and he liked this work the best of all. He liked the cool embrace of the water, the sullen booming of the logs, and the trumpeting and the crashing and the bellowing that went on all round him.

When the cold weather came, he would be ridden a good hundred miles down the great main streams of Siam, where his job was to straighten out stacks of logs that had stranded on the gleaming sand-bars as the rivers fell. On his return from these trips he would be sent to a rest-camp set in cool evergreen forest, to graze and recuperate during the three months of heat that followed the cold season.

In one of these rest-camps he first made the acquaintance of the most powerful of all the company's elephants, Poo Taw. He delighted in using his strength on all and sundry. As soon as he met Poo Lorn, he started bullying him. He would prod and thrust at him viciously with his tusks, so that Poo Lorn again and again had to leave a succulent clump of bamboo shoots and flee as fast as his hobbles would permit him. For several seasons Poo Taw took occasion to tease Poo Lorn, but the latter

invariably avoided a fight, content to bide his time. But he remembered.

When Poo Lorn was nineteen years old, a herd of wild elephants passed him in the night. They moved slowly, grazing as they went. Poo Lorn looked at them curiously and strange instincts rose up in his mind. Something told him that they were of his kind, yet different. They did not smell of man, for they were free, while he was bound.

It was perhaps the sight of them that awoke the fierceness deep down in his soul. He began to "swai," shaking his head so violently that the mahout fell off his perch, and another mahout was chosen to ride him.

Ai Kharn was a swarthy, villainous Kamoo of inveterate gambling habits, but one of the most daring of all the company's riders. Armed with a spiked iron goad and a wicked little dagger, he could compel the fiercest elephant to obedience.

Poo Lorn suffered himself to be mastered, but his dislike of servitude grew and grew, for those strange nameless instincts to make a long journey to the north were becoming more and more insistent. Ridden by day and hobbled by night, he was powerless to obey the call, and soon, with one notable exception, he began to hate all mankind. The brown people he hated, since these were the men who chained him, but he hated also the great white lord who ruled the company. It was the great white lord who first had caused his captivity; it was he who, when the coolies and chainmen were fast asleep, uttered loud shouts and aroused both men and elephants to work again.

Poo Lorn became sullen, morose, formidable. Even the company elephants began to hold him in

considerable awe. Poo Taw, jealous of his rival's size, essayed one more effort, and then at last Poo Lorn retaliated, fighting with a cold silent ferocity that would have boded ill for Poo Taw had not a gang of coolies, armed with spears and flares, appeared on the scene and separated the pair.

Thereafter a silent feud existed between these two, and it needed only some slight cause to start a battle that could end only in the death of one or both of the combatants. The coolies who had seen the fight, mindful of his fierce mien and magnificent gait, named him the Terrible.

Of this Poo Lorn was naturally unaware, though of his bodily strength he was now fully conscious. He had reached his twenty-sixth year, and thus was in the first bloom of that gigantic strength that was to make him famous, not only throughout the length and breadth of Siam, Burma and Malaya, but also in the lands of the Leu, Karen, Kamoo and a dozen other jungle-dwelling tribes.

Poo Lorn the Terrible swayed his vast bulk and brooded on the wrongs done to him by mankind. Fast bound by iron, he resembled a gigantic engine of destruction, possessed of the strength of a hundred Samsons and the soul of a tiger.

CHAPTER II

THE GIRL AND THE BEAST

As evening mellowed softly over the earth, Poo Lorn grunted, for his ears had caught the sound of bare footsteps approaching. A moment later

Ai Kharn came into view, and Poo Lorn suffered the hobbles to be taken off his legs and swung across his broad back. Ai Kharn then climbed on to the massive neck and by means of deft touches behind the ears guided the elephant down to the river.

When Poo Lorn's bath was over, instead of being taken back to the forest, he was directed towards the little native village of Ban Tern for the monthly inspection of the great white lord.

Through the dusty crowded market-place of the village, surly pariah dogs, with flea-bitten heads and cringing flanks, slunk away at his approach. Gaily apparelled Lao girls, laden with fruit, salt and tobacco, ran timidly into their huts, while even the men-folk shrank to one side, for was not Poo Lorn the Terrible walking in their midst?

Outside his teak house Check Lee was seated, drinking in the cool air of the evening, like a monstrous spider resting after weaving many webs. Beside the Chinaman sat Sang Noo, Check Lee's cringing Shan secretary.

As Poo Lorn's great bulk loomed past them, they cast covetous glances at the elephant, but Poo Lorn ignored them and went straight on to the compound at the end of the village.

Poo Lorn took his place at the head of the line. At the opposite end Poo Taw bubbled and rumbled with wrath.

From a large bungalow built on the right of the compound there emerged John Morrison, accompanied by his wife and their eighteen-year-old daughter Elise.

Elise loved the great compound and the dark, gloomy forest that encircled it. She loved also the brown men and the brown women and the elephants and the ponies that peopled her little world.

They were simple souls, these three. Living, as they had done, for years in the depths of the forest, many of the blessings of civilisation had been denied them. They merely did their respective tasks as well as they could, and loved one another.

As they halted before Poo Lorn, a striking thing happened: Elise ran up and gave him a thick, sticky ball of the pounded tamarind he loved. As the elephant slowly chewed the ball, the girl stroked his heavy trunk, and soon a deep rumble of satisfaction came from the depths of his gigantic body; for he was now with his only friend.

The friendship between these two had begun in curious fashion. When Poo Lorn was eleven he had come into the compound for the usual monthly inspection, and Elise, then a tiny tot of four, had broken away from her mother and run right in under his tusks. The onlookers, fearful of enraging him, had signalled to his mahout to remain absolutely motionless, and Poo Lorn, undisturbed by the goad, had made no effort to savage the child. Instead, he had gazed down curiously at this strange little creature below him. She had laughed, and with chubby hands that knew no fear endeavoured to seize the tip of his wriggling trunk.

The baby hands had tickled, and at their touch Poo Lorn had been conscious of some strange emotion arising within him. With the exception of the elephant-doctor, here was the first human being he had met who was neither afraid of him nor wished to do him hurt. He had felt her all over with his trunk, which made the child laugh. She had finally run back to her mother, who, weeping, caught her to her bosom.

Poo Lorn's mahout had then swung him off to the forest; but little Elise did not forget him. She

always waved to him when she saw him, and finally, when she was an active girl of twelve, she did a very daring thing, for Poo Lorn was by then in his twentieth year and already gaining an unenviable reputation for fierceness.

On learning that the elephant was hobbled in the forest close by the compound, she stole out of the gates one evening and went boldly up to him. She gave him some tamarind, spoke soothing words in Lao, and rubbed his trunk. He made no attempt to molest her; indeed, he seemed to relish her attention, but when Elise, flushed and triumphant, returned to her father's bungalow with news of the exploit, the story was received somewhat coldly by her parents. After she had been sent early to bed, however, John Morrison relented.

"We must let the child go to Poo Lorn if she likes," he told his wife. "If we forbid her making friends with Poo Lorn, she'll take the next opportunity of seeing him alone."

"Yes, and Poo Lorn will take the very next opportunity *he* can of killing her."

"He won't. I know elephants, and if ever there was a gentleman among 'em that gentleman's Poo Lorn. I'll swear she's safe with that elephant. I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll allow Elise to feed Poo Lorn only when his mahout is with him and I'm standing by with a loaded rifle. That ought to give her a pretty good thrill, and at the same time stop her from doing anything foolish, such as running off into the jungle and seeing Poo Lorn on her own."

Thus a friendship had begun between child and elephant that had grown firmer down the years.

But now, as Elise fed Poo Lorn while her parents kept at a respectful distance, Morrison carried no heavy rifle, for any possible need of that had van-

ished long ago. Morrison, as he gazed at the animal towering up high above his daughter, was conscious of a strange feeling of compassion for the huge beast he had tamed.

"I can't get into the mind of that elephant," he said presently.

"What can't you understand about him, Daddy?"

"I've never ill-treated him since he was broken in. Yet he seems to hate the lot of us bar you."

"Perhaps he wants his freedom again," ventured Mary Morrison.

Elise sighed. She perhaps more than anyone else had seen into the mind of Poo Lorn. He was just aching to be free, and her heart went out to him in his captivity.

"Daddy, Mother's right," she exclaimed suddenly. "Poo Lorn *does* want to be free. Why don't you let him go?"

"What—and lose the best timber-working elephant the company possesses? No, I'm not a fool. Still . . ."

Morrison bit his lip, for he had heard certain tales from the natives concerning Poo Lorn. Though his mother had been the very gentlest of females, rumour had it that Poo Lorn's sire was a wild elephant.

"Ai Kharn," he said, "from now on take double care that Poo Lorn's hobbles are well secured."

The mahout salaamed, and the leviathan was ridden off back to the forest.

Though not yet in his prime, Poo Lorn stood ten feet two inches high at the shoulder, and weighed well over nine thousand pounds. The great curved tusks were perfect in their symmetry. His massive head and shoulders were terrific in their power, while his legs were thick and stocky, as a good

elephant's legs should be. As Ai Kharn swung him round for inspection, John Morrison flung up his arms in admiration.

"If Poo Lorn isn't just the grandest thing alive!" he breathed.

"He is, but don't forget the other elephants," said Elise practically.

One animal after another was vetted, and finally John Morrison halted opposite Poo Taw.

Poo Taw's little pig-eyes were gleaming redly, and a thin trickle of oil exuded from an orifice in the forehead between the eye and the ear. This told the white man that Poo Taw was approaching "musth," a state in which all tuskers become highly dangerous. He therefore gave orders to the mahout that, for the time, Poo Taw was to be firmly shackled to a tree in the forest instead of being merely hobbled.

As the light was failing, John Morrison walked back to his bungalow. He had reached the foot of the steps leading up to the building, when a soft footfall sounded behind him, and he turned to see Sang Noo, the Chinaman's secretary, bowing low before him.

"And what does Sang Noo want at this hour?"

Sang Noo writhed and cleared his skinny throat.

"Lord," he croaked in Siamese, "my master, Check Lee, would fain see you on business of great importance."

Presently the Chinaman appeared. He walked slowly over the grass and bowed curtly to the white man.

"In the matter of Poo Lorn," said he.

"Eh?" exclaimed Morrison, surprised.

"In the matter of Poo Lorn. I give five thousand ticals for him, Mr. Morrison."

"Poo Lorn is not for sale."

"I give fifteen thousand ticals for him."

Now this sum, approximately one thousand five hundred pounds in sterling, was an unheard-of price for an elephant. But John Morrison did not betray astonishment.

"I repeat, Poo Lorn is not for sale," he answered coldly.

"Then is the great company losing much money by the refusal of its manager to sell the elephant."

Morrison's eyes widened.

"That," he replied, after a pause, "is my affair. Check Lee, hadst thou offered me the sum of fifteen thousand ticals for a dog, I would not have sold it thee. Because—I love dogs."

CHAPTER III

A PLOT IS HATCHED

BACK in his teak house at the end of the village, Check Lee ordered Ah Fong, his silent Chinese cook, to bring him tea. He sipped the tea from a tiny cup, and soon his slanting almond eyes became mere slits. Check Lee was thinking.

The Chinaman's ethics were simple. He had money, and money was power. With money one could rob, murder, eat, drink, enjoy all the pleasant things of life. And money he had without doubt, for countless little paddy farms round the outlying jungle villages were mortgaged to him. That little naked brown children died of starvation through his octopus-like grip mattered not to him; he was a man of business. His business was increasing, for he had recently begun dishonest dealing in teak and elephants. With the aid of a villainous gang of elephant thieves, he had estab-

lished a base over the distant French Indo-China border, where he would be safe from any possible interference by Siamese gendarmes. Under his directions the thieves stole various native chiefs' elephants, altered their brands, then rode them in secret to this base, where they were disposed of at good profit to Check Lee.

His heart yearned after Poo Lorn, partly from jealousy, and partly because that great animal would be invaluable in rounding up herds of wild elephants. Yet the Lord Morrison had refused as much as fifteen thousand ticals for Poo Lorn, and insulted him, Check Lee, into the bargain.

The Chinaman's eyes glinted like the eyes of a snake. Could not some revenge be found?

Finally Check Lee had an inspiration. He beckoned to his secretary. "Thou knowest Ai Kharn, the mahout of Poo Lorn?"

Sang Noo did, it appeared—well.

"Bring him secretly to me this very night," Check Lee ordered.

Half an hour later the mahout bowed low before the Chinaman.

"Ai Kharn," said Check Lee, "what pay dost thou receive from the Lord Morrison?"

"Great One, I receive but fifteen ticals a month."

"But fifteen? Then I have news for thee. I have big elephants over the Indo-China border, and I want a good mahout. Ai Kharn, if thou wilt join my service, a salary of twenty-five ticals a month shall be thine."

The mahout gaped, for the salary was a fortune.

"But, for this large sum, a certain little service is necessary before Ai Kharn shall join my elephants."

"Huh," croaked the mahout.

"The service is the cutting of Poo Lorn's tusks."

The plan for the cutting of the tusks was simple. The following afternoon, after Poo Lorn had been bathed, the elephant was to be hobbled in the jungle some distance away from the remaining animals of the company. He, Check Lee, would then send two of his own men with a saw and some spades. They should reach the elephant at dusk, and with the saw Ai Kharn was to cut the tusks. The act done, the tusks should be buried under a convenient tree with as much dispatch as possible. Then Ai Kharn's new contract would be drawn up and signed. Two guides would then escort him to safety and the Indo-China border, where he would start upon his new duties. Did Ai Kharn fully understand?

Ai Kharn did, but he was no fool.

"Great One, there will be much danger in this enterprise. I desire extra payment. In addition to the twenty-five ticals a month that you have promised me, I wish for a bonus of one hundred ticals, O Great One."

Check Lee did not hesitate.

"Here is fifty ticals," said he, "and the remaining half shall be thine to-morrow night."

Ai Kharn snatched at the money and went out into the night.

When he had gone Check Lee breathed a sigh of satisfaction. Should his plan bear fruit, he would be well revenged on the white man, for Poo Lorn shorn of his huge tusks would be of no more use for timber-work than any timid female elephant. The tusks would never grow again, while he, Check Lee, would, after a convenient lapse of time, dispose of them at good profit to himself; and as for Ai Kharn—it would be easy to arrange a fatal accident for him once he had served his turn.

CHAPTER IV

ELISE COMES TO GREAT DANGER

ELISE lay in a long rattan chair set in the coolest part of the bungalow.

The time was half-past two in the afternoon, and the thermometer stood at one hundred and five degrees in the shade.

Presently Elise rose from her chair and leant over the veranda railings. The heat from the compound leapt up and caught her in the face like the blast from a furnace. She put a white topee on her head and softly, lest she wake her mother, stole out of the bungalow. She crossed the two hundred yards of withering flame that lay between her and the forest, opened a tiny bamboo gate, and began walking along a small track that dribbled in and out between the towering stems.

In her ears was a constant deafening shrill caused by the crickets that sunned themselves in thousands on the leafless trees.

She walked on and soon came to deeper forest, where she sat down beneath the shadow of a huge tree and took off her topee. Elise was now in her beloved solitude.

Her parents decreed that two coolies should always accompany her on these rambles, but she was apt to forget certain orders where her freedom was concerned.

Elise sat on. At her feet the sunflakes, striking through the trees, moved noiselessly on the ground like spotted deer. Flights of kingfishers and jays whirled past her and disappeared into the green. They were things of beauty, all blue and red and

gold, splashing the atmosphere with vivid jabs of colour. Somewhere a few "did-you-do-it" birds were scolding from a tree. Then they found business elsewhere, and silence descended on the forest.

Gradually her ears distinguished further sounds. She caught the distant clink of hobbles, which told her that elephants were grazing in the vicinity. Perhaps Poo Lorn was one of them. She would walk along the path presently and see if she could find him, but for the time being she was content to rest.

Buds and nuts began to patter on to the ground. She raised her head cautiously, to see four gibbons, long-haired, silvery, with big dark sad eyes, sitting on the branches. Slow as the movement of her head had been, they scampered off, swaying and "whooping" from tree to tree.

Elise laughed and rose and went on up the path. The clinking of iron chains sounded closer, and she came to an elephant shackled to a tree some twenty yards to the right of the track. The animal belowed and lunged at her to the full extent of its chain, and Elise shrank back into the undergrowth that bordered the opposite side of the path. One glance at the gleaming wicked little eyes told her that here was Poo Taw, the elephant that her father had on the previous evening ordered to be shackled. Poo Taw was in a wicked mood, and though Elise knew she was safe from him, she shivered and ran hurriedly past.

In spite of the afternoon being on the wane, the heat was growing more and more intense. The sky had turned from a deep blue to a smoky-coloured golden haze. But as it was only half-past three she risked a storm and pushed on for another mile in the hopes of coming across Poo Lorn.

She passed several more of the company elephants, but of Poo Lorn there was no sign. At last, when some muffled rolls of thunder boomed, she gave up the search and turned back to the compound, now two miles distant.

She had not made more than a few hundred yards when the light failed, and a sound as of the roaring of many waterfalls rushed rapidly towards her—rain and wind approaching over the tree-tops. Elise darted behind a huge tree that had been blown down.

With tropical suddenness the thunder-cloud burst. Electric streamers flashed like skeleton leaves against the blackness of the clouds; the thunder boomed and crackled in continuous salvos; the rain descended in solid sheets; ever and anon some great tree could be heard crashing in a riot of splitting timber.

The air became dank and cold. Elise, crouching behind her own fallen tree, shivered and snuggled up close against the rough bark. She knew that these hot-weather storms soon blew themselves out, and not till the rain had ceased would she go on. A thorough drenching spelt malaria, followed by countless doses of nasty quinine and several days in bed. Soon the storm passed as suddenly as it had come.

Elise rose and began running back along the path.

Rounding a sharp bend, she came full in sight of an elephant standing directly on the little track. Involuntarily she halted, and for several seconds sheer terror froze her limbs. It was Poo Taw. Behind him a tangled mass of broken branches showed that the tree to which he had been shackled had been uprooted by the wind. The hobble

chains, jerked apart in the crash, were now trailing loosely behind him. Poo Taw was free!

For what seemed an age both girl and beast stared at one another. Then, with a screaming trumpet, Poo Taw charged. Quick as a cat Elise leapt sideways into the jungle and ran for her life. She held up both arms to protect her eyes from the thorns and creeper that plucked at face and clothing. Soon her breath came in sobbing gasps; specks flickered before her eyes; her hands and arms were torn and bleeding, but she felt no pain; she fought on blindly, desperately.

Bursting out on to a second path, she stopped and listened. Crashings and bellowings astern showed that the beast was still on her trail.

Thoughts flashed through her mind. To climb a tree was useless: a small tree an elephant could knock down, while the larger ones here were all of colossal height, with their lowest branches high above the ground.

She glanced quickly to right and left along the new path. Where it led she did not know, but she realised at once that it might prove her salvation. In the thick scrub Poo Taw would soon have worn her down, but her chances would be greatly increased on the open path.

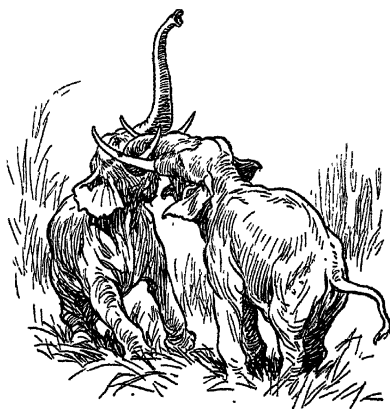
As she swung into her stride she heard Poo Taw's great bulk crashing out of the forest.

The girl was in perfect training, and she went now like the wind. Presently she burst into a large natural forest clearing, where she halted, sobbing with relief. On the farther side was a tree that might be scalable. It was tall and heavy, but its lower branches were not more than eight feet above the ground. But as she darted forward, the earth rose up and smote her. Blackness intervened, and when her senses returned she found that

she had stumbled over a rotten branch. She endeavoured to struggle upright, but an agonising pain shot through one of her ankles.

Another trumpet sounded back along the path. Death, sure and irrevocable, had come to Elise.

Then something was standing in the shade close by the tree she had thought to climb. It was difficult to make out clearly, so well it blended with



She saw Poo Lorn's trunk curl round one of his enemy's tusks.

the tricky patches of light that splashed through the foliage, but hope leapt like a live thing into her breast.

Poo Lorn the Terrible was glooming there, a gigantic shadow. He stood motionless, his whole being apparently concentrated on the scent of his rapidly approaching enemy. Elise forced her mind to action. Poo Lorn, hobbled, would stand

no chance against the comparatively free Poo Taw. Poo Lorn must have those hobbles taken off him.

She called to him, but he seemed oblivious of her presence. He merely looked over and beyond her, and a low bubbling note of wrath rose up from somewhere within his giant body.

Elise nerved herself. If he would not come to her, she must go to him. She began crawling towards him. With failing hands she slipped the hobbles off his forefeet. As through a haze she saw Poo Taw storm into the clearing, and the two great beasts shuffle towards one another; she saw Poo Lorn's trunk curl round one of his enemy's tusks and rip it out as a man plucks the stalk out of a pear. Then a merciful oblivion blotted out her senses.

CHAPTER V

THE FIGHT AND ESCAPE OF POO LORN

ELISE struggled to a sitting position. Her ankle throbbed and pulsed, every limb in her body felt bruised and shaken, while her mind was an aching blank. She glanced round in dumb wonderment. Where was this clearing in which she found herself, and why was it covered with a litter of fallen trees and branches?

She fought with a dream, striving to be free. Then, at one end of the clearing, she saw a huge shape lying on its side, and another great form bending over it. The dream vanished and with startling vividness full memory returned. Her heart galloped in her throat. Poo Lorn had been

victorious, for he it was who now bent over his fallen enemy.

Unable to tear her gaze away, Elise watched until the elephant left his victim and stalked majestically into the centre of the clearing. Curling up his trunk, he let out one great screaming trumpet of defiance, and the immense volume of sound, crashing through the trees, was taken up by the surrounding hills. The echoes rolled and faded. Silence descended on the forest.

Elise was white to the lips. No longer did the jungle resemble a peaceful quiet glade: it had become a fierce harsh wilderness in which great beasts fought and tore. She was back again in a world of the past, a world where man was new and vast leviathans roamed the earth. For, as Poo Lorn stood thus in his might, he seemed the very embodiment of the spirit of his mighty ancestors who had stalked the wild ranges when history was dim. Elise felt suddenly very small.

The silence was broken. Poo Lorn bellowed heavily and began striding round the clearing in a free swinging gait. A fallen tree attracted his attention, and, seizing it with his trunk, he flung it like a match-stick into the surrounding tangle of vegetation. He shuffled on a few more paces, and for the first time saw the tiny figure of the girl reclining on the grass. He bellowed again and moved straight and fast towards her.

Elise crouched paralysed. She could not move, she could not even think; she watched the giant form loom up above her, stop in its stride, and, motionless save for a constant swish of ears, stare down at her.

Her stillness saved her life, for presently the madness passed and sanity dawned on Poo Lorn the Terrible. He felt this tiny white creature with

the tip of his trunk, and a rumble, deep and friendly, sounded from within him. His friend was recognised.

Elise heard the familiar sound. Life held promise once more. Somehow she managed to struggle to her feet and lean against Poo Lorn. Oblivious of the blood that coated him, she touched his rough skin with the tips of her fingers.

The air grew colder and the light failed rapidly. Elise was forced to realities. Five o'clock had come and gone, and by now her parents would be thoroughly alarmed; yet here was she, lame and stranded in the depths of the forest. Poo Lorn, could she succeed in mounting him, would know the way back to the distant compound, but how was she to bend him to her will? Never, during all the years that they had known one another, had she given Poo Lorn a direct order, save to call upon him to halt. Indeed, the friendship between these two was founded on this very fact, but now circumstances forced her to make an attempt at riding him.

She signed and ordered Poo Lorn to kneel, but he made no effort to obey. Instead, he bellowed warningly and backed several yards away from her. Neither by word nor by gesture could she induce him to budge an inch.

Elise was beginning to despair, when suddenly a cry sounded through the jungle.

It came again, and Elise recognised the voice of her father. She called back in reply, and soon other voices could be distinguished.

She called a second time, then glanced at Poo Lorn. He, too, had heard. Soon the coolies would be upon the scene. They would close in upon him, pick up the hobbles and bind them round his fore-

legs, and his brief period of freedom would become a thing of the past.

But—Elise thought quickly—would Poo Lorn suffer himself to be taken prisoner again? In his present fierce mood there might be trouble; some of the men, perhaps even her father, might be killed or seriously injured, and Poo Lorn escape in spite of them all.

And what of Poo Lorn himself? Had he not always craved for freedom? Moreover, she had a debt to pay.

The shouts of men drew nearer, and Elise took a deep breath. She forgot her pain, her weariness, her recent trials. Pointing to the thickest part of the jungle, she spoke in English :

“Quick, Poo Lorn. Go before they come.”

Perhaps the gesture influenced him; perhaps he was already resolved. Whatever the cause, he broke into his peerless raking stride and muffled over the clearing. As he gained the fringe of the jungle, Elise’s high resolve suddenly collapsed like a cooling bubble. She was losing the friend of a lifetime. For the first time she realised to the full how much the giant creature had meant to her, and involuntarily she stretched out both her arms towards his retreating figure.

Suddenly, Poo Lorn swung round and faced her. Elise looked dumbly at him. She wanted him to go : she wanted him to stay; perhaps after all he was coming back. A strange gladness welled up in her heart, only to sink again as a low trumpet, sullen and menacing, rumbled through the quiet evening air. Poo Lorn was warning the approaching humans.

He turned again. For a second his great form showed up against the green of the jungle, and

then Poo Lorn the Terrible had passed beyond the ken of man.

An hour after dark that night, Elise was telling her story. As the result of it, her father made a double decision: he would report Poo Lorn's loss to his firm in Bangkok and to the up-country police, as he was bound to do, but beyond that he would leave the great animal to his freedom. Poo Lorn had earned his right to the wilds for the rest of his natural life.

John Morrison walked into the living-room of the bungalow. He filled a glass, then returned to the bedroom. He raised his glass.

"To Poo Lorn the Terrible," said he, "and may his great shadow never grow less."

Meanwhile a very different scene was being enacted in Check Lee's house. Ai Kharn had burst in upon the Chinaman, and his features were ashen. Briefly the mahout related the events that had come to pass. As ordered, he had met Check Lee's two men and the three had gone stealthily to where Poo Lorn had been left to graze in the jungle. As they crept along, the sound of the white lord's voice had been heard calling for his daughter. Fearful lest they should be discovered, Ai Kharn had pushed on alone, to find eventually that Poo Lorn had escaped after killing an elephant named Poo Taw. Thus their plan had come to naught.

When Ai Kharn paused for breath, Check Lee's slit eyes dwelt long upon the speaker. He read the mahout like an open book, and knew him to be telling the truth, for his own two men had already told him part of the affair, and the wildest rumours were current in the village.

So. Check Lee reflected, by some strange chance rather than through any fault of Ai Kharn, the discomfiture of the Lord Morrison had been averted. Check Lee hissed, but beyond a slight movement of the body he showed no signs of annoyance. He was far too big a man for that.

"So!" he said calmly. "And what does Ai Kharn propose to do now for a living?"

"Perhaps the Great One would still give me a position as his elephant-rider at twenty-five ticals a month."

But the Chinaman had no such intention; indeed, he never had. "Since no service has been done me, I cannot give Ai Kharn this post."

"Then will I stay with the Lord Morrison," replied Ai Kharn after a moment's reflection. "For he will without doubt give me some other elephant to ride, since it was through no fault of mine that Poo Lorn escaped."

It was the Chinaman's turn to consider the position carefully. He had at first intended to kill Ai Kharn, for dead men tell no tales, but now he felt inclined to revise this decision. If Ai Kharn remained in the service of the company, the mahout might possibly come in useful at some later date. As for his ever mentioning the plot to his master, for obvious reasons the man would be likely to keep his lips well sealed; besides, even should he speak, how would legal proof be forthcoming that an attempt had been made at cutting Poo Lorn's great tusks?

Check Lee addressed the mahout. "To stay with the Lord Morrison is good, but"—he fingered his ivory-handled knife—"nothing of last night's conversation is ever to come to the ears of thy master."

"Great One," replied Ai Kharn fervently, "may I be eaten by gold devils if I do not obey your order."

"There is one more little matter," went on Check Lee smoothly. "Yesterday I did hand over to thee the sum of fifty ticals. Where is it?"

"Great One, after I had left your house I went to a gambling shanty. Great One, I did then lose every one of those ticals."

Check Lee hissed again. Whether Ai Kharn was lying or not, the sum must be considered a total loss.

"Go!" he said suddenly, and the mahout bowed himself out of the room.

Presently came Ah Fong, the cook, with rice and chopsticks. With expressionless face he served his master, and neither exchanged a word during the meal. The repast at an end, Ah Fong clattered back to his kitchen on his small slippered feet.

CHAPTER VI

POO LORN ENTERS HIS WILD KINGDOM

IMMENSE, mysterious, Poo Lorn the Terrible surged forward through the darkness, heading northwards in his newly found freedom. He travelled all that night and far into the next morning, and then halted to rest in the heat of the day. He drank from a jungle pool, squirted streams of water over his body, and with his forefeet kicked up some loose earth into a little mound. This earth he seized with the curled end of his trunk and sent it flying all over his damp body. Covered thus with a thin layer of mud, he was protected from

the myriads of stinging pests that constantly harassed him, and at leisure to graze in peace and comfort. He fed for four hours and slept for two; then on he went again.

At dusk next day he passed a herd of wild elephants, and some young bulls, swinging round at his approach, looked at him in threatening fashion. At sight of them his heart throbbed with excitement; but, though the desire to join this herd was strong within him, a greater urge was driving him northwards. Accordingly, he passed unchallenged and continued on his journey. He forded bubbling rivers, climbed precipitous hills, crossed treacherous ravines, clove through vast stretches of tangled thorn country where an eternal twilight reigned; but never once was he at fault for his direction. The blind nameless instinct, that had been implanted in his soul for as long as he could remember, guided him with unerring accuracy towards his distant goal.

Thirty days after leaving them, Poo Lorn returned to this very same herd. The journey being over and the object of his quest discovered, his wish was now to mix with his wild brethren and become their lord and ruler. He rolled slowly in between the huge bulks on either side of him, whereupon the herd abruptly left off grazing and called to one another. The cows, vastly pleased to have some cause for fright, squeaked and rapped in terror; but not so some of the bulls. They advanced towards him, unmistakable enmity in their gait. None the less, awed by Poo Lorn's huge size and fearless mien, none of them dared to attack him. They preferred to rumble with wrath and wait for their leader to come upon the scene.

Soon a huge elephant, standing well over nine feet at the shoulder, stalked majestically towards

Poo Lorn, the others making way for him as he came. The pair challenged, charged, and locked in terrible conflict. The old bull was wily, and being the winner of countless other fights, at first took this young intruder, large as he was, to be an easy prey. As for Poo Lorn, though he stood a foot higher than his antagonist, he found the wild tusk-er a far worthier enemy than Poo Taw, and soon he was fighting for his very life.

They screamed and bellowed across the dry bed of a nullah, then lurched and stumbled into the forest again. Great trees were sent crashing by the shock of their gigantic struggling bodies, the noise of the falling branches mingling with the shrill trumpetings in one vast paroxysm of sound. Bamboo clumps were torn up and flung to one side as if a whirlwind had passed; the earth was churned, scarred, reddened with the fury of the battle; huge boulders went rumbling and bounding down the steep hill-sides; the very air seemed to quiver with the uproar. Sleepy brown bears, startled sambhur and barking deer, wild pig, animals of every kind and description fled in terror, for the kings of the jungle were battling, and well they knew that any living thing that chanced to cross their path would be trampled out of existence.

The battle ended as suddenly as it had begun. The old tusker, staggering and bleeding from a hundred wounds, gave up the struggle and shambled off through the trees, to disappear for ever from the sight of those whom he once had ruled. Poo Lorn's fresh young strength had prevailed, and though he could have followed up and slain his beaten enemy with ease, he forbore; he had no personal quarrel with the old bull beyond gaining the leadership of the herd, and this was now all but accomplished.

Poo Lorn returned to the herd. He flung up his tusks, gleaming red and white in the fiery rays of the sun. Proud and magnificent, he screamed again his challenge. The remaining bulls bubbled, threshed—then resumed their interrupted grazing. Young though he was, Poo Lorn the Terrible had entered his kingdom.

The months passed pleasantly for Poo Lorn. Since his defeat of the old bull no animal questioned his right to leadership, and he was free to take the herd to whatever haunts he chose. In the main he elected to stay where first he had found them, for the position was favourable. There were large jungle streams with deep pools in which they could bathe every morning and evening; there were cool inviting clumps of bamboo under which they could rest in the heat of the afternoon; and, best of all, the grazing for miles around was plentiful. The season Poo Lorn loved best was the rains. Then the jungle leapt into life. Bamboos sprouted and flourished; lush grass clothed the earth in waving mantles of green; the trees thickened, taking and giving fresh life; rivers swirled, bubbled, cleansed and soothed, and scurrying clouds hid the merciless sun. This rainy season, that brought sickness and death to human beings, brought only added strength and enjoyment to him and his kind.

When the hot weather came, Poo Lorn led his companions far afield. They sought for dark evergreen ranges where they could escape the pitiless rays of the sun, for this giver of light and warmth proved the elephants' worst enemy. Under the fierce glare of the cloudless sky the trees shed their leaves and provided neither food nor shelter; the earth became rough and hard, making the huge beasts' feet sore and tender; the streams dwindled

to nothing, leaving beds of shining white stones in place of cool running water; the whole jungle resembled a harsh yellow wilderness, hostile, stern, an enemy to life.

But Poo Lorn and his fellows had instinct to guide them, and, though they travelled slowly in order to give the cows time to rest and suckle their little calves, they invariably found some shady retreat far up in the hills. Then, when the welcome south-west monsoon came roaring and swirling over the tree-tops, back they went to the old grazing grounds, where fresh young grass would be springing up over countless miles of country.

Thus the seasons followed one another in pleasant restful fashion; but when Poo Lorn had been some eighteen months with the herd, danger threatened in the shape of some men under the command of a native chief.

This chief had tracked down the herd, and noted the number and size of the animals. Now, with the aid of flares and tom-toms, he was hopeful of driving them into a large bamboo stockade he had prepared for their reception. The chief and his helpers were experienced men; for days they had stealthily observed the movements of the herd, and by keeping well to leeward of it, never once allowed themselves to be scented. But they had reckoned without Poo Lorn, who had behind him a full twenty-five years' practical experience of man.

Though the cows are usually to be found in the van of grazing herds, Poo Lorn had always been careful to occupy this position himself, and now, as he heard a clamour break out behind him, he moved slowly forward. Soon he arrived at the head of a nullah, where he halted abruptly. Evidently danger in some form or another lurked in the re-

cesses of the creek, else why did these men-animals desire him and his companions to push on down it?

Poo Lorn swung round his bulk and, passing through his flustered herd, approached the line of humans behind them. They were shouting, yelling, beating gongs, making a great deal of noise, yet they did not appear formidable. Poo Lorn therefore trumpeted with rage and at a fast shuffle charged straight at the thin line of beaters.



The remainder of the animals, after a momentary hesitation, followed him, with the result that the dusky Laos and Kamoos were cast aside like chaff before the wind.

Dropping their implements, they fled for their lives, and, when the last of the elephants had disappeared from view, hastened to the stockade,

where the chief was patiently awaiting the arrival of his victims.

Their words were short and to the point. They had been engaged, they said, to help in the work of trapping elephants, not super-elephants.

Super-elephants?—the chief asked in puzzled surprise. Yes, for at the head of this herd was an elephant of the size of ten whole elephants in one. (Here the Laos exaggerated—but they were very scared.) This elephant had appeared large enough when first they had seen it grazing in the forest, but at close quarters it proved to be a veritable monster. It was utterly fearless of them, they continued, and charged them in spite of the fact that they yelled and shouted till their lungs well-nigh cracked under the strain. They would take no more part in the affair. This elephant was a devil, and to have anything to do with devils was very bad medicine indeed.

Even the chief turned white when he heard this tale. He accordingly gave orders for camp to be struck, and hurried by a short cut through the forest to his home in Lakon Lampang, a native town situated at the head of the Siamese railway. The town lay a good hundred miles distant over wild rolling country, but he completed the journey in five days—no mean feat in the height of the rains.

Back in his little house, he paid off his coolies, then burnt candles till far into the night in thanks for his deliverance. Early the next morning some of his friends came to see him. They squatted on their hams on the split bamboo flooring; they bowed and inquired courteously after the chief's health; they chewed much betel-nut; the pungent smoke of native cigars encased in banana-leaf filled the little room.

He told them of the venture: how, when first he had been tracking the herd, he himself had seen from a distance this vast elephant. Even then, said he, it had been taller than the tallest coco-nut tree; but when it had charged his coolies it had swelled in size until it hid the very heavens. Without doubt it was a god or devil sent to protect wild elephants from mankind. He had experienced a merciful escape from death.

Presently the guests rose, bowed politely, and slip-slopped out of the ~~house~~, marvelling greatly. They went to their homes, where they told their friends, and by evening the whole town was agog. Under the hissing flares of the market-place, Lao girls talked between mouthfuls of rice-cake of this wonder the chief had seen. Tiny brown piccanninies puffed at their cheroots and shrilled the news to one another. Solemn brown men debated the matter with streams of betel-juice and suckings of breath. Even the khaki-clad police, grouped within the high wooden walls of the prison, heard of the rumour and spoke of it with interest. But they did not connect this huge wild elephant with the name of Poo Lorn, whose loss had been reported to them many months ago by the manager of the teak company. They merely smiled with flashes of white teeth, yawned, drooped, rolled over into slumber.

Night cloaked the little town of Lakon Lampang. Light and sound vanished from the market-place. Tall banyan-trees and palms guarded the horned temples and slim pagodas of the faithful. Slumber wrapped both man and piccaninny. At his stall the patient ox drooped his head. The meek water buffalo dreamed and stirred in his sleep, as if urged to the plough he had pulled all day. Pariah dogs

curled—thin round yellow balls of forgotten misery. The world gathered strength for the coming day.

Yet one white human being did not sleep. He leant over the veranda railings of his bungalow and stared with unseeing eyes into the scented darkness. He did not hear the harsh croak of the bullfrogs, the only other living things awake. Young Richard Cairns, fired by the talk he had heard in the market-place, was planning his campaign.

CHAPTER VII

POO LORN LOSES HIS HERD

RICHARD CAIRNS was by profession an elephant-trader. At the age of twenty-one he had been left a comparatively large sum of money and had decided to make a round tour of the world, avoiding the beaten tracks and visiting those countries that still remained comparatively free from tourists.

In due course of time he arrived at Bangkok, and went up-country to view the great teak forests that stretch for mile upon mile over the north of Siam. Arrived at the head of the railway, he hired carrier coolies and made an extensive tour of the north.

Soon the fascination of the jungles caught him, as it had caught many a good man before. He went on a few tiger-hunting expeditions, and then his interest began to centre on the elephants, both wild and tame, that abounded everywhere. He met Shans, Burmese, Laos and Siamese who made a living by rounding up wild elephants and selling them to various native contractors and European

traders. Could not he, too, do this? The work would enable him to remain in or near the jungles he loved, and yield him a handsome profit into the bargain.

With his main base at Lakon Lampang, young Cairns began elephant-trading. This new profession certainly proved exciting, but it did not give him that handsome profit he had expected. The cost of buying good tame tuskers, of hiring coolies, forest guides and hunters, ate up most of his remaining capital; and, cool and efficient though he was, he experienced little luck in rounding up any animals of real value. He persisted in his efforts, however, only to find himself at the end of two years back in Lakon Lampang with his pockets well-nigh empty.

Now this strange tale of a gigantic tusker was going the rounds of the town. That the creature was a god or devil he did not believe. He, Richard Cairns, would capture this giant. Thus would his fortunes be restored and a long stay up-country assured him.

Early the next morning he hastened to the native chief from whom the tale had sprung, and got full details of the size and whereabouts of the herd.

Overcoming the fears of his coolies and mahouts by the promise of a great reward, he set out with his tame elephants. As the rains had not yet cleared, he made no attempt at a short cut through the jungle. An old cart-road, so his map informed him, ran for the first seventy miles or so, and along this he jogged on his pony with his line of transport trailing out behind him. Though scarcely recognisable as such, the road made better going than the rough tangled paths of the jungle, and in four days' time he had arrived at the village of

Ban Tern. Here, according to the map, he should strike off the road and proceed another sixty miles in a northerly direction through the forest, and by then he should be in the reputed grazing grounds of the herd.

The first stage of his journey being completed, he set up his tent for the night close by the little village, for there a supply of fresh eggs and fruit would be procurable. Soon old Lao women, toothless and wrinkled, were visiting the camp with their wares, and from them he learnt that a great white lord lived in a bungalow set upon the hill. Cairns, anxious to see one of his own race again, bathed hurriedly, then strode up the slope towards the company compound.

He found John Morrison alone in the bungalow living-room, and the pair shook hands.

"You'll stay to dinner," said the manager as a matter of course. "My wife and daughter will be glad to see you. They're dressing now."

Young Cairns expounded his plans, and when he had come to an end John Morrison gave vent to a loud and prolonged whistle.

"That elephant's Poo Lorn for sure," said he.

"What!" exclaimed Cairns. "You've heard of him?"

"I have," answered the other dryly. "Poo Lorn was one of my company elephants—a grand beast, and the biggest tusker I've ever seen. Early last year he escaped, and we haven't heard a word of him since. But I reckon this giant is Poo Lorn right enough. Now that's bad luck for you, young man."

It was indeed, but Cairns' lean face betrayed no sign of emotion. Should the elephant prove to be Poo Lorn, he must surrender the animal to the company to whom it rightly belonged.

"How much would you give me if I recaptured Poo Lorn?" he asked after a pause.

John Morrison frowned. He wished the elephant to remain free, but he could scarcely prevent an effort being made by some outsider. Moreover, there were his firm's interests to be considered.

"I'll give you two thousand ticals if Poo Lorn is absolutely unharmed," he told his companion.

"Done, sir," said Cairns briskly. The reward, though much less than the full market value of a tusker, was fair enough, and the remaining animals of the herd would be his to sell outright. The herd, so the chief had told him, consisted of some eight bulls, sixteen cows, and a few young calves: a goodly number and a worthy bag.

The deal clinched, Cairns was introduced to the manager's wife and daughter, and dinner was served by a dusky Lao boy in a neat white tunic.

"Poo Lorn," said John Morrison as the soup was handed round, "has been located. He's been found at the head of a wild herd grazing some sixty miles from here. Mr. Cairns is out to capture him again."

"But Mr. Cairns mustn't do anything of the sort," said Elise decidedly.

Richard Cairns flushed. He was not used to orders from any man, either white, black or brown, yet here was this girl taking a hand in his private affairs.

John Morrison laughed. "Sorry, Cairns, but my daughter was rather a particular pal of Poo Lorn's, and when you've heard the story you'll understand. According to the natives, Poo Lorn's sire was a wild elephant, and the result was that he hated being hobbled. My daughter sympathised with him, and then one day he actually did get loose and——"

"Anyhow, I'm sure Mr. Cairns won't catch

Poo Lorn," said Elise. "Poo Lorn's much too clever to allow anyone to get the better of him."

Cairns looked at her with interest. She was a good kid, if a trifle spoilt, he decided, and he would try to draw her out.

"We can't allow sentiment to interfere with business, Miss Morrison," he told her. "Besides, I've given your father my promise that Poo Lorn doesn't get hurt."

"Oh," exclaimed Elise, "I don't think it's *he* that will get hurt."

No more mention of Poo Lorn was made till dinner was over, and then Elise went straight up to where the guest was standing.

"You've made up your mind? You're still going through with this?" she asked him suddenly.

"I'm afraid I must, Miss Morrison."

"Mr. Cairns, Poo Lorn once saved my life."

Richard Cairns was as stubborn as she.

"I am sorry, but I cannot go back on my word," he said steadily.

She swung away from him and walked out on to the veranda, leaving the others staring uncomfortably. A minute later she returned to the room.

"Forgive me. I'm spoilt, I suppose. Mr. Cairns, forget my silly temper and make up a four at bridge. We don't often get the chance of a game."

They played till close on midnight, and then Cairns rose to leave. His companions escorted him to the gateway of the compound, where they shook hands.

"I'll be back within a month and tell you all the news," he said. "And many thanks for the evening."

"Take care of yourself," said Mary Morrison

"Good luck to you, Cairns," added her husband cheerfully.

"Good luck to . . . to Poo Lorn," said Elise.

True to his word, on a rainy afternoon four weeks later, Richard Cairns came riding up the slope on his pony. The Morrisons hastened to meet him.

"I've got the herd——" Cairns flung himself out of the saddle and mopped his brow.

"Ah—"

"But not Poo Lorn."

"Not Poo Lorn?"

"No. He wasn't with the others when I rounded them up."

"H'm. Come on into the bungalow and have a yarn," said John Morrison.

Installed in a comfortable chair, the younger man related his adventure. He had tracked down the herd without much difficulty, but of Poo Lorn there had been no sign, though his hunters had searched far and wide for any elephant of unusual size. Finally, giving up all idea of finding him, they had concentrated on the capture of the herd itself. A keddah of bamboo stakes had been built, and after a few days the herd had entered like so many sheep. The tame elephants were then sent into the keddah to rope the wild ones, and after a few more days the latter had quietened sufficiently to be led. Cairns had then freed a few of the weaker animals, and the remainder were now being brought by easy stages on the long journey back to Lakon Lampang.

"And where are you camped now?" asked Morrison.

"On the banks of the River Mae Lang, about four miles from here. My elephants are there, too."

"Well," Elise said, "I think everything has happened for the best. Mr. Cairns has bagged a lot of wild elephants as a reward for his trouble, and Poo Lorn goes free. It's funny that Poo Lorn should have gone off on his own like that."

"Are you sure, Cairns, that you haven't been after a different herd?"

"Positive. The number of animals was the same, and their description tallied exactly with the information given me by the chief."

"Daddy, now I come to think of it, wild elephants *are* known sometimes to leave their herds for several weeks on end, but they always come back to them sooner or later. What I'd like to know is—where do they go on these lonely journeys?"

"Where do they go?" echoed her father. "No one knows. I doubt if anyone ever will know. That's one of the elephants' secrets."

"And I'd also like to guess," continued Elise. "what Poo Lorn will do when he returns and finds his herd missing."

"Join another one, I expect," answered her father. "Cairns, you'll stay to tea and dinner?"

"Thanks, sir, but I must be riding back to my camp."

But John Morrison had no intention of allowing his visitor to leave so soon. He, Morrison, had now grown too old for a good deal of the hard work of forest inspection, and already his head offices in London were writing to him on the subject of his retirement. An assistant, so they said, would require at least two years' practical experience of the jungle before qualifying for the post of manager, and they were therefore considering engaging a reliable youngster and sending him out to be trained.

Yet whom would they send? This question had

been Morrison's constant nightmare. Head office might choose someone totally unsuited to rough work and hardship. Worse still, they might send out a man who would soon give way to loneliness and drink. Fearful of this, and loath to leave the country he loved so well, Morrison had so far succeeded in delaying the choice of a new assistant, but now he realised that his bosses would wait no longer. A letter must be written at once, informing them that they could go ahead.

Morrison glanced at his lean sunburnt companion. If he read young Cairns aright, here was just the man for him. Cairns was clean, hard, deadly keen on the forest, and he spoke the Lao and Siamese dialects like a native. Cairns should be sounded.

"Why ride back to your camp and spend a night in a damp tent when I've got a spare bungalow in the compound for you? A rest in a comfortable bed would do you good," he said.

"It's an idea," said the other.

"Then that's settled. I'll send a coolie out to tell your men you won't be back till the morning, and Elise can get your bungalow ready. Meanwhile, here is tea."

Later it rained heavily, and the two men withdrew to Morrison's private room.

"This trading in elephants—do you make much money at the game?" he ventured.

"Not much," confessed the other. "Though this last batch ought to put me on my feet again."

"Still, it's a risky business, isn't it?"

"It is."

"Then why carry on at it? Couldn't you get a job in England or Bangkok?"

"Yes, but I'd rather stay on up here."

Morrison glanced through the open window.

All round the back and sides of the compound the jungle crept. It was dark, gloomy, dripping with moisture and breathing of death. The rains hung over the forest like a pall.

"You mean to tell me," he said, "that you prefer these sodden jungles, when you're not even sure of a decent return?"

"Yes, and I believe you'd do the same."

Morrison decided. Here sat the very man for the job.

"There's a way," said he slowly, "in which you can remain in the jungle, and earn a decent salary."

"I wish I knew of it."

"It's simple. I'm retiring in a couple of years. Why not become my assistant, learn the work, then take over my forest when I retire?"

"You mean that, sir?"

"I do. Think it over. You'll have as much jungle-life as you'll want, going rounds of inspection in the forest, and you'll have a comfortable compound and bungalow to return to after the trips. But don't hurry in your decision."

"I've already made it," broke in Cairns. "But what about you, Mr. Morrison? You've only seen me twice."

"That's my own look-out," answered the other dryly. "Now why not stay on as my guest for another two or three days? That will give you time to consider the matter fully and enable me to explain some of the work to you."

"But what about my elephants?"

"They will be all the better for a rest. You can keep them in your present camp, and ride out and inspect them every morning."

"I will," said Cairns fervently.

"Then, at the end of your stay with us, and if

you decide on the job, I'll write Bangkok and London. They will agree, but it will take three months to get London's reply, and meanwhile you can take your elephants into Lakon Lampang and sell them there. That will start you on your new work with a nice sum of money at your back. Can do?"

Richard Cairns drew a deep breath.

"Can do, sir," he said, "and I hope I don't make too much of a fool of myself at the job."

CHAPTER VIII

THE VENGEANCE OF POO LORN

POO LORN, after a prolonged absence in the north, was back again in his grazing grounds. But where was his herd? He cruised around in the neighbourhood, and soon he discovered an empty stockade consisting of sharp bamboo stakes that had been sunk into the ground. He circled it, then left it for further investigations. After a while he came across one or two old cows and a decrepit tusker, but his followers as a herd had ceased to exist.

Poo Lorn's brain moved slowly, as if unable to fathom the extent of this disaster. And then he struck a trail. The trail was easy to follow, for many elephants had passed along it, and here and there the remains of man-made camp-fires littered the jungle clearings. Pausing only for brief intervals to rest and feed, Poo Lorn swung along this trail till he came out on to the bank of the River Mae Lang.

Here a path ran along the bank parallel to the river, and up it he proceeded till the noise of distant trumpeting sounded on his ears. He now went

forward more cautiously, and shortly he scented men-animals and heard their chatter. This caused him to leave the path and seek again the shelter of the fringing jungle, through which he pushed his great bulk without so much as the crackling of a branch. A few hundred yards' progress brought him to the edge of a large clearing. Halting, he peered through the leafy screen and beheld a strange sight.

Tethered to various trees surrounding the clearing stood the majority of his wild companions, while near them were several tame elephants whom he did not recognise. Every now and then a brown man would bring fodder and throw it down before the captured beasts, then walk across the open space to where some rough bamboo shelters had been erected.

Poo Lorn made neither sound nor movement till a new scent came down the wind, whereupon he swayed from side to side and bubbled with suppressed wrath. A white man had ridden into the clearing and dismounted. He saw the white man inspect the tethered elephants, speak a few words to the mahouts and coolies, then spring on his pony again and ride hurriedly away to the north. Once the man was out of sight Poo Lorn ceased his bubbling, and, after putting a good mile between him and the clearing, halted a second time and brooded.

So the herd he had ruled had been captured in his absence, and by the white man of all people! It was the white man who had first caused Poo Lorn to be bound to posts, then kept in bondage for year upon year; it was the white man who caused both mahout and elephant to slave at heavy timber-work; and now this white man had done this final and terrible wrong to him.

Poo Lorn rumbled and threshed. To him John

Morrison and Richard Cairns were one and the same: they possessed the same scent and wore the same clothes. They were the only living creatures he had seen upon horses, and in consequence of this Poo Lorn's fierce soul was consumed with wrath that cried aloud for vengeance.

To rescue his companions seemed impossible, nor could his brain fathom what he should do to bring this about. One course, however, did remain, and that was to lay waste the compound at Ban Tern and trample to death the man he hated. In his sullen rage the memory of the little girl who had once been his friend was lost; he was now an engine of destruction, and destroy he would.

Though the desire for action was hot in his mind, he did not hurry. The night was the time for him to strike, since then the humans slept. He therefore remained in the forest till close on midnight, and then he swung into his stride. Though the clouded sky made the darkness as black as pitch, his eyes were capable of dilation far beyond the power of any human, and he pressed through the jungle as if in broad daylight. He knew every inch of his present surroundings, and found the path by the river with ease. He passed the clearing where his elephants were tethered, and no one saw him go by, for the whole camp lay deep in slumber. He struck the little track that led to Ban Tern.

An hour later he had reached the outskirts of the village. Here a sudden impulse caused him to move straight ahead instead of swinging off to the left up the hill towards the hated white man's compound, and shortly the sleeping market-place walled up on either side of him.

He came to a standstill, towering up on the muddy lane like a huge shadow, as black as the

night that clothed him. The last time he had been in this self-same village a mahout had sat astride his neck, and chains were upon him. But now he was free to use his gigantic strength as he liked.

He approached the tallest of the dwellings, which happened to be the teak house of Check Lee, the evil Chinaman. Luckily for that gentleman and his secretary, both were absent on some secret business over the border, and they thus escaped a highly unpleasant fate, for Poo Lorn was no bungler. The house was built on tall stilts to protect the owners from the dampness of the rains and any possible attack from wild animals, and round one of these stilts Poo Lorn curled his trunk. He heaved, the post snapped like a twig, and the whole building swayed. Two more posts were quickly spilt in half, whereupon the Chinaman's house crashed sideways.

The noise awoke the inhabitants of some huts near by. They rushed out on to the pathway, heard strange rumblings and bellowings, screamed hurried warnings, and fled for their lives up the hill.

Having trampled the broken house under foot, Poo Lorn proceeded to further destruction. Several more shanties along the line were hurled down and pounded to pieces, while the remainder of the villagers rushed wildly to safety without so much as a thought for their scanty possessions.

Pandemonium reigned in the little hamlet. Men, women and children screamed and yelled, then vanished into the night; chickens clucked, fluttered, beat frenzied wings; squealing pigs wallowed and slithered round the mud beneath the houses; from their pens bullocks bellowed hoarsely and stamped; several water buffaloes, freeing themselves from the stakes to which they were

tied, went galloping down the market-place, bleating in alarm; and, to add to the uproar, the howls and barks of countless pariah dogs rose up from every quarter.

Suddenly the clamour from the animals of the village came to an end, for Poo Lorn had made off to another destination. He now stalked up the hill towards the compound, where, unknown to him, the majority of the brown people had fled, seeking John Morrison's protection.

The Laos had assembled in the huge garden, and at their head stood the white manager, accompanied by Richard Cairns. John Morrison grasped a shot-gun, and his companion a bamboo spear taken from the office. Each stared intently through the gloom.

A muffled trumpet sounded in the darkness below the rising ground, and a shiver went through the waiting crowds, some of whom carried flares that lit up their brown faces. The manager nudged Cairns's arm.

"Heaven knows why we're holding these weapons," he whispered. "They are about as much use as a pea-shooter and a toothpick for what we are up against."

Cairns grinned mirthlessly. A spear and a shot-gun to ward off the attack of an elephant!

"Remember," the elder man said, "if the animal charges, you take care of the mob that bolts to the right, while I go with those that run in the opposite direction. After that, don't allow 'em to bunch together too much."

"I've got you," said Cairns. "Hallo, who's this?"

A white form sprang out of the darkness, and both men turned to see Elise rushing towards them.

"Father," she panted, "it's Poo Lorn. It must be. Let me go ahead and meet him before he reaches the compound. I can stop him from doing any damage. I simply know I can."

For once John Morrison was almost rough with his daughter. He had put her, together with her mother and some of the women and children of the village, behind the pony stables at the extreme end of the compound, for his past experiences of rogue elephants told him that they invariably avoided any spot where ponies had been tied. Between horse and elephant a sense of fear and distrust apparently existed, and Morrison had therefore given Elise strict orders not to stir from the lee of the stables; yet here she was, offering to go out, alone and unprotected, and meet the terrible death that ever drew nearer.

He seized her arm.

"Nothing living could stop him now, child, only a dose of cold metal. Cairns, hold my gun while I take Elise back."

By the time John Morrison returned to the side of his companion, Poo Lorn had arrived at the gates of the compound. The gates were shut, but he simply went straight through them. A moment later he was striding across the lawn. He saw the black mass of people, but he did not fear them or their flares. Curling trunk over tusks, he charged. The humans scattered to right and left, and the dim shape of the white man's bungalow rose behind where they had been. Poo Lorn made for the bungalow. As he did so a loud report sounded and he received a sharp sting in the side, of which he took no notice whatever. He shuffled straight on, intent on the bungalow.

Arrived there, he immediately began operations.

Like the Chinaman's, the building was supported

on posts made of heavy squares of teak and stronger far than any in the village. Poo Lorn, therefore, made no attempt to pull at them, but stooping, placed the thick root of his trunk against the stoutest. He then heaved with the whole might of his body, and the post split and fell.

After two more had been dealt with, he drew back a few paces from the bungalow, for he was no fool. Many a time he had cleared piled-up stacks of teak logs in the river, and he knew the danger as they came tumbling and crashing down. This bungalow, too, was large and heavy, and he realised that he must keep at a safe distance when it fell. He therefore went round to the jutting-out front veranda, which he began pushing with the ends of his tusks.

Soon the whole building swayed. John Morrison drew in his breath. It cut him to the quick to see his home destroyed, yet he avoided a second shot. To wound the elephant again would only enrage him, while if he were left to work his will unhindered he might return to the forest without having killed a single human being.

Poo Lorn, undisturbed by such trifles as pellets from a gun, pushed mightily at the swaying bungalow. It lurched over sideways, hung poised for a second, and then collapsed like a pack of cards. He trod and thrust savagely at the ruins, after which he turned to the other big building in the compound. This chanced to be the company's office, which was built on a level with the ground. Since he could not knock it down, he contented himself with shattering one of the walls and ripping up part of the roof. The wall, as it bulged inwards, sent writing-desks flying in all directions. Letter-files, ink bottles, surveying maps, typewriters and

foolscap littered the floor, and the records of years were rendered useless. Poo Lorn's revenge was far greater than he realised.

At last, satisfied that he could do no more, he began striding round the compound, seeking for the white man. Vaguely aware of figures flying hither and thither, and of a confused crying and shouting, he became bewildered. He swung in uncertain fashion from one part of the garden to the other, and finally came to the conclusion that he was tired. His trunk was sore and swollen, his sides were scarred, and his giant legs ached with weariness. The peace and quiet of the jungle called.

Therefore he plunged into the forest at the back of the compound. He passed some of the hobbled elephants of the company, who chirruped nervously, but these he ignored, and soon was several miles away from the village. Selecting a patch of long thick grass, he halted and brooded.

On the morrow he would return to his deserted grazing grounds, and there he would stay alone for the rest of his life. No more company for him! The presence of wild companions might bring humans to the spot again. No, he would remain solitary, but—should these humans ever attempt to recapture his own giant body, he would deal with them in dire and terrible fashion.

Poo Lorn the Terrible brooded alone in the teak forest. Five miles away brown men wept, cursed, squalled and yelled, but the whites wasted no time bemoaning their fate. They comforted the frightened, cared for the homeless, worked all through the night and far into the following morning.

Richard Cairns, as for hour after hour he toiled, carried two visions in his heart. One was of Poo Lorn the Terrible. Clothed by the night, he had appeared to be of almost uncanny size and

grandeur. Trumpeting, bellowing, tearing down huge buildings as if they were stacks of cardboard, Poo Lorn had indeed resembled some terrific god of vengeance, and the sight of him had been awe-inspiring to the last degree. Though he lived for a hundred years, young Cairns would never forget that night.

The other vision was very different. A small white face, with shining eyes and hair, swam out of the gloom, and again he heard that offer to meet almost certain death.

"That girl," muttered Cairns to himself, as he carried a tiny homeless brown mite to shelter, "that girl can't know what fear is. I wish I could say the same for myself."

PART II

CHAPTER IX

UNDERSTANDING

Two years had gone by since Poo Lorn's raid, and now the village of Ban Tern and the company compound looked much the same as ever. The brief tropical winter was at hand, and the harvest due to be gathered. The rice-fields waved green and gold in the clear sunlight. Beyond the village the River Mae Lang flowed like a silver ribbon, and no sandbars showed. The jungle expanded and breathed again. The sky was cloudless, but the air was cool and refreshing.

In the new bungalow built by her parents, Elise sat and dreamed. Soon, in a few short weeks, her father and mother would be leaving the country for an unknown world of civilisation, and she by rights should accompany them.

Elise sighed. Whether she remained in Ban Tern or left for England, there would be partings that would wrench at her very heart.

Elise glanced at her watch. Richard was often late, so keen had he become on his work. Often he was absent for a whole month on prolonged jungle tours, and when he did come back she would see but little of him.

At first he had been inclined to treat her rather as a child, but that had quickly passed. As he learnt that she could ride and swim as well and fearlessly as he, a frank, healthy companionship between the two had begun; but of late this, too,

had changed. Why did he not speak? Perhaps he was afraid of her; perhaps he did not wish to take her from her parents; perhaps

Elise returned to the present. She sprang from her chair and hastened out on to the veranda, for her ears caught the sound of a pony's hooves galloping over the grass. She saw Richard pull the pony to a standstill, fling the reins to an attendant syce, then walk with free swinging stride over to his little bungalow at the farther end of the compound.

She knew he would soon emerge, bathed and refreshed, and either make his way to the office or else come straight for her father's bungalow. She waited for half an hour, and then, clad in a white drill suit in place of his rough khaki jungle-wear, he hurried along the gravel path that led directly towards her. She waved and ran down into the compound to meet him. She saw that under his bronze he was very pale.

"Elise, come into the jungle. I want to talk to you." The words were terse, peremptory, harsh almost.

She made no reply, but suffered herself to be led across the compound and through the little gate into the dark green of the forest beyond. They went a few hundred yards along one of the jungle paths, then he stopped abruptly and faced her. He was white now to the lips.

Overhead the leaves stirred and whispered to the breeze. Tall arches of bamboo bowed their fronds in a stately dance. A jungle stream, clear, cool, fringed with moss and delicate ferns, murmured and soothed. Evening dreamed sweetly over a fairy world. No pain, no sorrow, no tears existed in this world, for beauty only reigned.

John Morrison, his work in the office at an end,

crossed over to his bungalow. Mary left her task of pruning roses and joined him.

"It's come," she said simply, and he knew at once what she meant.

John sank into a chair and hid face in hands. His forest was soon to be taken from him, and now his daughter, whom he loved better than any forests in the world, would also be leaving him. But it was the law of life; it had to be and he would not complain.

"There's just the two of us now, old lady," said he.

The stars frosted the heavens. A whistling teal flew overhead with a high thin treble note. Cold mists wreathed the compound, but in the cheerful bungalow living-room, as a clock chimed midnight, the two men sat smoking.

"I suppose I ought to give you some advice, young fellow," said John Morrison.

Cairns coughed to hide his confusion.

"You think it's about Elise I'm going to talk," went on the other suddenly. "Well, it's not. If there's one thing that least concerns other people, it's a man's marriage. You've got Elise, and I think you'll make her happy. No, it's about the forest that I'd like to speak to you."

Cairns breathed a sigh of relief and settled down to listen. John Morrison had lived the better part of his life in jungle surroundings, and any hint that the old man could give was welcome.

"Remember, Cairns, in working the forest you've got to give elephants pride of place in your thoughts, for without them you can't get a single teak log down to the mills in Bangkok. Now you've seen all the company elephants during the

time you've been with us, and I guess you think you know a bit about 'em now, eh?"

"I reckon I know the name, appearance and character of every animal in the force," said Cairns proudly.

"Well, it's more than I do. I may know their names and general appearance, but I'm hanged if I know all their characteristics. You'll soon find out, Cairns, that the more experience you have of elephants the less you'll understand them."

"You have me there, sir," confessed Cairns, grinning. "Carry on."

"Now take the elephants in our force. They're about as mixed a lot as one could imagine. Some don't like river-work, as the rush of the water frightens them; some don't like hill-work, though why I've never been able to make out; some don't like other elephants; while some can't stand the sight of certain coolies or mahouts. Some won't allow themselves to be hobbled on their forelegs, so their hindlegs have to be bound. Again, some have very particular pals and it's a waste of time trying to separate them from their chums. Yes, Cairns, you know all that, of course, but has it ever struck you *why* the brutes have such queer likes and dislikes?"

"I should think they hardly know themselves."

"That's just where you're wrong. They do. An elephant never behaves in a certain fashion without cause, and it's part of your job to find out what that cause is. I remember a baggage elephant of mine who was always giving trouble on the march. Whenever she came to a sharp bend in a jungle path she would halt and trumpet, and it required a good mahout to make her move.

"I thought that curious. I made inquiries into her history, to discover that years ago she once

rounded a blind corner and almost trod on a panther. It slashed at her, then bolted; but she never forgot the incident. Well, as soon as I heard of this I tried a remedy. Up till then she had always travelled ahead of my other baggage elephant, but now I put her behind. Result, I never had trouble with her again. If a panther happened to be lurking around some corner, her companion would get his attack first and she would be safe. I reckon that's how she figured it out.

"Natives need some understanding, too." continued Morrison. "Here are a few last tips before we go to bed. Natives are like children and must be treated as such. Never lie to a coolie, never argue with him. Once your decision is taken on a point, never go back on that decision even should it prove to be a wrong one. When your men are tired on the march, make 'em laugh, and the simpler the joke the better, for they don't understand sarcasm in the least. Make some plain direct statement about the raggedness of somebody's pants you happen to see, and on they'll go for miles, laughing for all they're worth. Again, never hit a native unless he insults you personally. Then hit, and hit hard."

"I will," said Cairns grimly.

"One last word. You haven't seen much of Check Lee, the Chinaman down at the village, and I hope you won't. Still, keep your weather eye on him. He's a villain if ever there was one. And now good night and good luck to you."

CHAPTER X

A JOURNEY AND A PARTING

LONG lines of carrier coolies trudging along the dusty cart-road; the squeaking of stirrup leathers and sweating of ponies; tall stems of forest trees bordering the countless miles of the road; then wide open paddy-fields of coarse brown stubble and the little native town of Lakor Lampang.

The train pulls out of the town station on its four-hundred-mile journey to the south. A roaring and thrumming of wheels; ravines, bubbling rivers and waterfalls; wild rolling hills clad in the peace of the jungle; then the flat plains of Central Siam. Vast paddy-land again, dotted with white egrets and meek water-buffalo. Villages; huge desolate spaces; more villages. The dwellings of man increase and the villages become a continuous wall. Spacious villas, white railings, a race-course, the hissing of steam, whistles, the flares of wooden sparks, a huge cool station. Bangkok.

Sweetly running cars. The native quarter. The pad pad pad of perspiring rickshaw coolies. Gharries with white-turbaned Indian drivers; hens; a collision narrowly averted; the brown neck of the Malay chauffeur at the wheel; pigs; the sickly smell of durian; Chinamen; vendors of rice cakes; yellow Siamese women; whiffs of rotting vegetation—the native quarter far astern.

The New Road. Trams, clanging of bells; shops big and small; blue panungs, white panungs, scarlet panungs; Europeans and their fine ladies; a

sharp turn to the left and broad open roads with gardens on either side.

A hotel. Clip-clop clip-clop clip-clop—a Chinese boy brings an iced drink. Ice. A coolness past belief. A bath in a real bathroom, and a real dinner served by real waiters in a real dining-room.

A mosquito-net, huge and airy. The soft drone of an electric fan. Comfortable sleep. Then the fierce sun strikes through the shutters and sleep is a thing of the past. A hurried toilet with hands that fumble and seem all thumbs. Then a car again and the dark coolness of a church.

A clergyman appears from nowhere and murmurs. Blurred shapes. A crowd. Handshakes. The clinking of glasses. Interminable delay. At last a departure for the wharf, and a steamer looms up against the tossing waters of the river.

The low mangrove swamps on the banks sweep by and the sea receives the steamer. Flying-fish spread out like fans on either bow. Chinese junks—slow, cumbrous, barge-like—veer past. The day is alive with colour and the night with stars. And both are magic, since the most wonderful dreams have come true.

Java. Queer pony-carts, tidy Dutch settlements, all pleasant green lawns and smooth veranda. Trips up through coffee and sugar plantations to huge volcanic mountains.

Then the voyage back to Bangkok. A last handshake there with the old people, and a hurried departure for the north-bound train. Once more the thrum of wheels, then the familiar march back along the cart-road through the forest. Tall coconut trees; the dusty market-place of the village of Ban Tern; the slope of the hill; Kamoo and Lao coolies bowing low before them. So Richard and Elise entered their domain.

That night, their first night as master and mistress of the compound, Richard remained alone for some time on the outside veranda. A cool wind fretted and he drew great gulps of it into his lungs.

Around him, mantled in gloom, stretched a thousand square miles of forest, and now he was lord of all that vast area. Under him were one hundred and fifty timber-working elephants, five hundred coolies, mahouts and chainmen, and dozens of felling camps and girdling parties. Even the inhabitants of the various little villages scattered throughout the forest would render him fealty now that he had become the number one great white lord of the district. Almost limitless power lay in his grasp, and he gloried in the knowledge.

But with power came responsibility, and Cairns was not one who shirked his duties. As he could order both man and beast to bend to his will, so must he help them in sickness and distress. Should the villages report danger in the shape of a man-eating tiger or leopard, he must go quickly to their aid. Should his coolies go sick, he must bring them back to health and strength again. As for his elephants, he must watch, tend, doctor and try to understand these giant beasts. A grand task, he mused, and better far than the wastefulness of any big-game hunting expedition.

Elise was another and even greater responsibility. The wilds he could handle, but could he keep her safe and happy? He was alone in a foreign land. No white man lived within one hundred miles of him, and all the decisions, all the burdens, now lay upon his own pair of shoulders. Well, he, Richard Cairns, would not be found wanting in this great new test. Elise would ever come first and foremost in his thoughts.

That night, John Morrison, too, sat thinking

alone in the darkness. The sea wind was on his brow and its murmur in his ears, but he neither heard nor felt it. He was back in the land he loved. He forgot the tortures of a fevered brain, the mud, pests and discomfort of a jungle life. He remembered only the thrill of it all.

Ahead of him lay England, with every luxury that his savings could buy. Yet England to him was a strange country peopled by strangers who had different tastes, different ideas, different modes of life. The word "home" was on every man's lips save his. He was leaving home.

The ship lurched, for, though the monsoon had not yet broken, the sea was choppy. Morrison clutched the windward rails and the harsh black waters caught his eyes. The moon was racing over scudding clouds and the Southern Cross reeled low down in the sky. Pale shadows swept across the chill waste.

A door opened behind him and a flood of yellow light rayed across the deck. A gust of laughter and tobacco smoke wafted through from the smoking saloon.

Morrison shivered and strode along the deck.

The hatchway received him. He descended the ladder and zigzagged along a narrow alleyway between white-painted walls. Arrived at his cabin, he opened the door. Mary was in her bunk, reading by a light sunk in at the head of the bed. She smiled at him sleepily.

"Had your nightcap, old man?"

"I'm a fool," said he; "but I somehow can't face that crowd. Too much living alone, I suppose."

"But you must go into the saloon some time, dear. Why not get it over now? I'll tell you what. Drink to our next visit to Siam."

"Mary, you're talking in your sleep."

"Indeed, I'm not. You see, though you've left the forest as manager, there's no reason why you shouldn't go back there as a visitor, is there?"

"No, but . . ." Morrison paused. "It wouldn't be fair on the young people. They'd think we'd come back to see how they were running the show."

"Oh, but we wouldn't go back just yet, for we both need a few years of England to set us up again first. After all, you're still on the right side of sixty, John. Don't forget that."

"I was forgetting it," he admitted, "but I'm not now." And John Morrison fairly bounced into the saloon.

CHAPTER XI

A GREAT ADVENTURE IS PLANNED

THAT year the rains broke heavily, and Cairns found many duties on his hands. During his two years' apprenticeship under John Morrison he had discovered many magnificent teak trees in certain parts of the forest that had been too remote and hilly for the elder man to penetrate. These trees had been girdled at the time, and now had to be felled, logged, measured and hammered, then dragged by elephant to the nearest jungle stream.

This work of felling and dragging could be carried out only in the rains. In the hot weather the precious trees would either split as they crashed to earth, or else run the risk of being burnt in the dry creeks by the numerous jungle fires. In the rains, however, the tree stems were soaked with

moisture, the ground was damp and soft, and the streams became bubbling yellow torrents. For day after day, therefore, Cairns had his camp set in a tiny forest clearing, from which he set out every morning to supervise the work.

One rainy afternoon in the middle of August Richard Cairns was carried into the compound on the back of an elephant. His feet and ankles were covered with sores caused by leech-bites and constant soaking in muddy water; his blood, poisoned by the stings of countless anopheles mosquitoes, boiled with fever, and he had shrunk to a mere ghost of his former self. Though the nearest missionary doctor lived in Lakon Lampang, and the cart road leading there was impassable through mud, Elise did not lose her head. She sweated him in blankets, dosed him with quinine and aspirin, bound his sores in bandages smeared with camphor and carbolic. When he was cured, out he went again to his work.

On another occasion he accidentally stumbled upon a hornets' nest. Knowing the danger, he fled for his life away from these terrible red-and-yellow striped deaths, but none the less he received four nasty stings. His neck and face swelled almost out of recognition, and the poison awakened the fever in his bones. Back to Elise he came for more nursing; then out to the forest once more.

The rains ceased. The streams sank, and the forest, from being a sinister dripping wilderness, became a cool cathedral of greenery. Elise was now able to accompany her husband on some of his trips.

The mornings grew cold and a mist hung upon the earth. Followed by their baggage elephants and coolies, they would steal quietly along the silent jungle mazes. Soon the sun would pierce the mists and set the dew glistening like drops of gold on the

quivering leaves. Arrived at the top of a hill, they would pause to admire the view. Beneath them rolls the landscape, but not a patch of land is visible. The ground lies hidden underneath a swelling green mantle of innumerable trees.

Sometimes, in their quest for likely spots where teak might be found, they would camp beneath the shadow of a huge wall of rock. To the right of the little tent towers the wall, huge and forbidding, to the left the primeval forest. Hundreds of monkeys chatter, whoop, spring from crag to crag, screaming their indignation at the arrival of strangers. A jungle-cock, all scarlet and gold, crows and scuttles into the undergrowth. A sambhur bells. Long red squirrels run along the spreading branches. Birds flutter, cry, and seek their nests.

Night falls, swift and threatening. Logs are dragged by the coolies into the centre of the clearing, and soon a huge fire blazes merrily. Chairs and tables are brought out of the tent and placed round the fire. The cold wind rises, roars through the tree-tops, whines and drones round the harsh rock walls. The fire sparkles, hisses, dies. The humans return to their tents. A barking-deer shatters the night with hoarse bellow. A tiger, alert and terrible, sends out his low moaning call, and horror stalks through the gloom.

A fine season, this cold weather; but all good things come to an end, and soon the hot months arrived with furnace breath. Leaves fell from the trees and covered the earth with a crackling mantle. The crickets shrilled like saws, and water became scarce. The elephants were sent to rest-camps, and the slackest period of the year ensued.

It was then that Richard Cairns received his call for help. The message came in the shape of a



Screaming their indignation at the arrival of strangers.

perspiring coolie, who brought news that a young teak-wallah in charge of a distant forest was seriously ill with dysentery and unable to move. Cairns prepared for an immediate forced march. His master's bungalow, so said the coolie, lay nearly a hundred miles due north of Ban Tern, over wild mountainous country where even riding would be impossible. Cairns therefore got together six of the fastest of his own coolies and, after promising them an extra reward if they hurried, set out from Ban Tern with the messenger as a guide. Elise wished to accompany him, but he refused to allow her to leave the compound. The journey under the fierce rays of the sun would prove a fearful undertaking, and Elise now had a tiny budding life to consider.

Cairns completed that journey in four days, an almost superhuman accomplishment, but he arrived one day too late. As he neared the little bamboo dwelling built in the heart of the forest, an ominous calm prevailed. No mahouts, no servants, no coolies were to be seen in the vicinity, and Cairns whitened under his tan, for he knew well that the natives, fearing either devils or unmerited blame, always flee from the scene of a white man's death.

Cairns mounted the rickety ladder, and a small dog, half pariah, half fox-terrier, snarled warning from above. He strode past it and approached the bed. A flutter of white on a small table at the head of the bed caught his attention. He bent and read the painfully written words:

To whoever may come. Look after my dog.

Though Cairns had not known the young man, his face was working when he buried him in a

lonely forest grave. Then, accompanied by the little dog, he started back for Ban Tern.

Cairns took the return journey in more leisurely fashion, for his coolies were dead lame and he himself was badly exhausted. When half-way back he camped one afternoon somewhat earlier than usual, as he had struck a dense patch of jungle whose foliage gave grateful shade. Tea was brought to him in his tent, but after he had drunk it a vague depression settled upon him. He had seen one of his own race left to die alone in the forest, and now ghastly thoughts crowded in upon him. He pictured Elise falling ill while he was absent on some jungle trip; he saw her, fearful lest she should cause him needless anxiety, sending him no news, but gradually wasting away in the deserted bungalow, he saw a white face, perfect as marble. For the first time the fear of the jungle had entered Richard Cairns's soul.

He picked up an old newspaper and endeavoured to concentrate on its pages, but, try as he might, he could not shake off those visions. Eventually, tired though he was, he reached for his shot-and-ball gun. The light still held, and he would go for a short stroll on the offchance of a shot at a wild pig or green pigeon. Morbid fancies are apt to be bad for a lonely man, and he realised only too well the necessity for some immediate occupation.

In case the little dog should startle the game, he signalled for it to remain behind, then left the tent. He passed the coolies' small shelters, in which the men were cooking their rice, and entered the forest.

He had not made more than half a mile from camp when suddenly he came upon an elephant. It was standing with its back towards him, and had evidently not sensed his approach, for his feet were clad in rope-soled shoes that made no sound,

and what little wind there was blew directly in his face.

Cairns halted and stifled an exclamation of surprise. On either side of the elephant's broad stern could be seen the faint brand marks of the teak company, and these, together with the huge size of the animal, told him that by sheer accident he had come across Poo Lorn the Terrible.

For a full minute Cairns gazed at the unsuspecting elephant. Then, turning, he crept silently back to camp. Morbid fancies no longer tortured his brain: a great adventure called.

Three days later Richard Cairns marched into the compound at Ban Tern. Elise, on the look-out for him, walked slowly down the bungalow steps to meet him. She saw no stretcher beside him, only a little dog, and she knew that his long journey had been in vain.

"Too late," he said soberly. "This is his dog. He left a note asking for it to be looked after."

Elise bent and stroked the terrier's head, for she knew the love a lonely man has for his dog.

"Old chap," she whispered, "we'll make you just as happy as we can."

Strangely enough, Cairns mentioned nothing to his wife of the meeting with Poo Lorn till nearly a week had elapsed, though his thoughts centred continually round the great animal. To recapture Poo Lorn would be a feather in his cap and would bring him into the good books of his superiors in London and Bangkok. Moreover, this year there were a number of unusually heavy logs to be dragged into the jungle streams, and for this work Poo Lorn would prove invaluable. Yet what would Elise say when he told her of his plans?

One evening after dinner Cairns broached the subject.

"By the way, I saw Poo Lorn the other day," he said off-handedly.

"Poo Lorn? Where?"

Briefly he told her the circumstances, and she glanced at him in puzzled fashion.

"But why have you only just told me, Dick?" she asked.

Cairns threw his cigarette away. He would waste no time in needless argument.

"I've been thinking over things, and now I've decided. Elise, I'm going to have one more shot at capturing Poo Lorn."

"Have you thought what may happen if you fail?"

"If I fail he'll remain free, I suppose."

"Yes, he will. And he'll come to the compound and give us a far worse lesson than the one he gave us before. Why, it's sheer madness even to think of going after him again."

"I've got my heavy rifle," said her husband grimly. "If he pays us another visit he'll find himself up against something far worse than a shot-gun or a bamboo spear. But he won't have a chance of attacking the compound again, Elise. I'll capture him before he does any damage. I swear I will."

Elise bit her lip. Both she and Richard had recently gone through a considerable mental strain and were a trifle on edge.

"I thought you knew something about elephants, Dick!" she flashed at him suddenly.

For answer Cairns rose abruptly and stalked out of the bungalow. The taunt had stung him to the quick and sent hot words rising to his lips. He held

them in check, however, and walked twice round the compound, with his head in the air. Then he returned to his wife.

"Forgive me," he whispered. "I was a cad. I'll forget all about Poo Lorn. On my word of honour I will."

Womanlike, now that her point was scored, she relented.

"Listen," she said: "you may have just *one* try if you promise to be good."

He stared at her in amazement.

"I'll get straight down to business to-morrow," said he.

She smiled at his eagerness; but there were conditions to be made. No cruel methods such as pitfalls were to be used. Dick was, wherever possible, to direct operations from a safe distance and run no risk of a personal encounter with Poo Lorn. Cairns readily agreed.

There was no sleep for the man that night. A golden opportunity had come; the forest work was at its slackest, and consequently all the company elephants could be brought out for the chase. Poo Lorn would almost certainly be captured, and then what would follow? Cairns saw himself taming Poo Lorn's fierce soul through sheer attention and kindness. He saw the great elephant doing much valuable work for the company; he saw it of an evening coming into the compound, the envy and admiration of all; he saw it taking tamarind from tiny hands; he saw strange and wonderful visions all that night.

The sun rose, fierce and hard. The compound leapt into life. Headmen, forest trackers, mahouts and coolies buzzed with activity. Gossip flew round the little village. Soon the talk reached the ears of Check Lee, the evil Chinaman, back again in

his reconstructed house after some secret trip over the border.

"Sang Noo," said the Chinaman to his secretary, "I have heard that the elephant Poo Lorn has been located, and that the young white man plans a drive. That is true?"

"Great One, it is true."

"Then see that some of my men, unknown to the white man, follow at a distance. And whatever the result of the chase, let it be reported to me at once."

CHAPTER XII

THE MIGHT OF POO LORN

Poo LORN the Terrible, alone as ever, was standing in the thickest part of the forest, where dark evergreen trees shaded him completely. Though he had attained his full height at the age of twenty-seven, since then he had grown more and more mature with every passing season. His great body had thickened, his strength became even more gigantic than when he had escaped from man, and by now he had reached his thirty-first year and was thus in the full bloom of his health and power. He stood ten feet four inches at the shoulder; his weight was over five tons; each of his giant feet measured sixty-one inches in circumference; his long curved tusks were peerless in their grace. In the whole of the vast jungle ranges stretching from India through Burma to Siam there was no elephant mightier than he.

On the whole he had led a peaceful easy-going

POO LORN OF THE ELEPHANTS

existence, for since his raid on the compound at Ban Tern he had been left completely undisturbed by man. There were the jungle people, of course, queer stunted little beings who sometimes passed near him as he grazed; but these he knew were very different from the natives who dwelt in villages, and accordingly he made no effort to pursue them.

These jungle people were mostly nomads. They built precarious huts, then left them for others, and at all times they lived in great fear of elephants. Poo Lorn in particular they revered; they soon made a god of him. As time went on and he showed no inclination to savage them, they became bold enough to approach him with offerings of choice jungle fruit. He suffered them to do this, as he liked fruit, and thus the seasons went by in quiet restful freedom.

Every now and then, however, that strange desire for the north would return, and he would make the long journey there and back again. Every living creature of the forest gave him a wide berth, though once a rogue wild elephant had attacked him. The rogue was a large powerful beast, made doubly strong by solitary brooding that had well-nigh reached the point of madness. Its little pig-eyes glowed wickedly as with a hoarse bellow it surged forward upon Poo Lorn.

But from the very start the brute never had a chance; it was never given a real opportunity of showing its mettle, since Poo Lorn simply smashed it. With one mighty thrust of the head he sent the animal sprawling; five minutes later it had ceased to resemble an elephant at all. Poo Lorn, scarcely wounded, passed on.

But now his freedom was to be disturbed at last, for he sensed that men and tame elephants were

approaching. After all these years they were pursuing him again. Let them come. He disdained even to move as yet. He waited, listening intently.

Presently he saw that a cordon of elephants, mounted by mahouts and men carrying ropes, had completely surrounded him. His method of dealing with this situation was simple and direct. He charged straight at the cordon, knocked over the elephant that happened to be in his way, and escaped.

Slackening his pace, he moved on for a mile or two; but he had not reckoned with the plans of young Richard Cairns. Fully aware of Poo Lorn's terrific strength, he had arranged for constant relays of fresh men and elephants to harry him for hour after hour to the point of exhaustion.

Soon Poo Lorn heard the mob approaching him again. This time, however, they made no attempt to surround him. They merely kept him on the move by driving him forward until, enraged, he turned and charged the line. The line scattered and allowed him to pass through, then closed, turned and followed him up once more. This went on till night had fallen, and at last Poo Lorn was left in peace.

He rested for an hour, then burst into the clearing where he knew the humans were camped. But Cairns had laid his plans well, and all Poo Lorn found was an empty space of sward. The mahouts and coolies were perched in the safety of machans built high up in the surrounding trees, and Poo Lorn, after wallowing about in fruitless fashion, plunged into the forest. Here he passed some of the tame hobbled elephants, but with that queer wild courtesy of his he made no attempt to gore them.

At dawn the next day a fresh lot of elephants

appeared on the scene, and the driving of Poo Lorn began anew. The sun climbed up the brassy heavens, the jungle simmered with heat, and by the time the shadows were lengthening Cairns came to the conclusion that Poo Lorn was rapidly tiring. He therefore gave orders for a cordon to be formed and for the men to hold their ropes in readiness. Soon Poo Lorn was completely surrounded.

Undaunted, he charged and overthrew the elephant he singled out for attack; but several ropes found their mark. Curling round tusks and legs, they aroused him to double fury, and his weariness vanished as if by magic. Bellowing and trumpeting, he plunged forward, dragging behind him at least three elephants. These promptly lost their heads, bellowed, squalled, strove vainly to pit their strength against his, then fell over on to their backs.

Indescribable confusion followed. Frantic with fear, mahouts and ropemen flung themselves off their charges and ran; and it was only by prompt action on the part of Richard Cairns that tragedy was averted. Jumping from the elephant he rode, he seized a knife from a passing coolie and with it cut the ropes that bound Poo Lorn to the others. Poo Lorn, raving and trumpeting, shuffled on a few yards and then, plunging and kicking, freed himself from the loosened coils that clung to legs and trunk.

Night fell. Poo Lorn was too weary to seek out his tormentors. He spent the hours of darkness in alternate grazing and sleeping. At dawn the cries of humans were wafted through the thin air. They were still on his trail, and, though his proud spirit was yet unconquered, he knew that for the present he must abandon all thoughts of resistance. He must seek refuge in flight.

Now he knew of the proximity of a deep swirling

river, with countless waterfalls and rapids, that still ran fast and strong in spite of the hot dry weather. He had crossed this river before on some of his rambles, and to it he made with all the speed of which he was capable. He arrived at the river bank and was preparing for the plunge, when the crackling of bushes sounded behind him and he whirled. A tall rangy elephant, with legs that enabled it to get well ahead of its companions, burst out of the fringe of jungle and was right upon his heels.

Poo Lorn was tired out and the river had yet to be crossed, and he therefore resolved to take to the water at once. But suddenly the mahout caught his eye—none other than Ai Kharn.

Weary though he was, Poo Lorn charged. As usual, the rangy elephant was knocked clean off its feet and rolled bellowing on the ground. Ai Kharn and the three men he had with him for roping were thrown clear, and all four rushed for the safety of the nearest tree, up which they skimmed like monkeys. Poo Lorn, arriving at the foot of their refuge a moment too late, had to be content with pounding and thrusting at the base. The tree, however, was a huge forest giant and beyond the strength of any elephant to bring down, so he soon gave up the attempt. Hearing sounds of further pursuers, he turned round and entered the cool river.

Seven more tame animals, including Richard Cairns's own, burst out on to the bank in time to see Poo Lorn's giant form surging across the bubbling stream. Their riders saw the whirling eddies, heard the deep rumble of the waterfalls; and they knew that only one elephant alive could cross the terrible expanse of hidden snags and deathtraps.

As before they had wished for his capture, so

now they wished only for him to live, and their hearts were in their mouths as they saw him battle against the fearful odds. Every few minutes he would disappear completely, save for the tip of his trunk; then up he would come again. For a full half-hour he fought with every ounce of his last remaining strength, and when he finally gained the safety of the opposite bank an involuntary sigh of relief went round the spectators.

"Of a truth," said one of the mahouts, "Poo Lorn has earned his freedom."

The others echoed approval and Cairns was with them. Poo Lorn had fought a gallant and magnificent struggle, and his heart went out to his adversary.

Cairns raised one hand. His eyes were shining and his normal calm had deserted him.

"Up!" he cried, and at the command every mahout lifted his goad.

"Come, my lords, your salute to a king among elephants."

Down came the goads and a great roaring trumpet blared and bellowed over the gleaming breast of the river. Poo Lorn's reply, low and sullen, echoed back, then his huge bulk swayed into the wall of forest that bordered the farther bank.

Three days later, Cairns told Elise the whole story. Several of his best tuskers were lamed, his men were exhausted, much company money had been expended, yet still Poo Lorn roamed free as air.

"And honestly, Elise, I'm glad that he does," he concluded. "He beat me every time at my own game, and now I'll leave him alone for the rest of my days."

Leaving the bungalow, he crossed over to the

company office, where he found his mahouts and coolies awaiting the extra pay promised them as a reward for their exertions. He handed them each the sum of ten ticals in Siamese Treasury notes. The last to come before him was Ai Kharn.

"Lord," he said, "I desire a reward above the others, for was I not the first to reach Poo Lorn when he stood on the river bank?"

Cairns considered the remark, then handed him five more ticals; but the sum did not appear to satisfy him.

"I also desire a rise of ten ticals a month in my wages," he said in easy tones. This new white lord was young and inexperienced, and the mahout was going to take full advantage of the fact.

"Thou talkest monkey's talk," answered Cairns after a pause. "No mahout on earth receives such wages."

"Lord," said he, "I ask for this sum because there is no other mahout like me on earth."

Cairns glanced at the villainous features of the native and read the vanity marked therein. "Thou hast a swollen head, Ai Kharn," he told the man.

"It is the master who has one," answered the other surlily.

Now if there is one thing that no white man can allow the natives to do, it is to let them answer back in insolent fashion. The white man in the depths of the wilderness lives by prestige, and prestige alone. Once that has gone, honour, security, even life itself is at stake, and consequently Cairns reddened in anger. He longed to strike the man to the ground, but with an effort he refrained. The mahout, though tough and wiry, was far weaker than he, and there was a better way of humbling him than the use of violence.

"Ai Kharn, thou art dismissed my service for ever," he said icily.

The full significance of the remark seemed lost on Ai Kharn for a while, but as the horrible truth dawned on him, he swung on his heel and walked out of the compound. He passed through the village and reached the forest, where he sat on his hams beneath a shady tree.

He, once a great mahout, even at one time the rider of Poo Lorn himself, was now a man without a job and of no more importance than the lowliest pariah-dog that ever sniffed round a garbage heap. And this had come about directly through the injustice of the Lord Cairns.

The Lord Cairns. Ai Kharn thought long of the white man, and a great desire for vengeance had enveloped him. But that must wait. Work of some sort must be found at once.

He remembered Check Lee. Ai Kharn waited till nightfall, then pattered back to the village, bound for the Chinaman's teak house.

CHAPTER XIII

THE AGONY OF POO LORN

CHECK LEE sat in his house, and a grim smile curved his thin lips. Only that morning his runners had told him of Poo Lorn's escape towards the Indo-China border.

Check Lee pondered.

To recover after his terrific exertions, the elephant would remain for several days on the farther side of the river. He must strike before the animal regained his strength.

He would trap Poo Lorn in cruel fashion, break his proud spirit, alter his brand, and take him over

the border to join his force of stolen elephants. The risk was comparatively small.

Now for the choosing of a skilled and fearless mahout. For the moment Check Lee could think of no man suitable for the task. Imagine his surprise, therefore, when soon after dark Sang Nool led in Ai Kharn.

"Great One, I desire an elephant to ride in your service," said Ai Kharn in respectful tones.

"But is not Ai Kharn in the pay of the great white company?"

"Great One, I am tired of the white company. This very morning I told the Lord Cairns so."

"That is probably a lie," said Check Lee blandly.

"Great One, it is the truth."

"Ai Kharn, thou art a knave and a liar. All the same, I have in mind an elephant for thee."

"The Great One is good to his servant," muttered Ai Kharn gratefully. "And my wages, O Lord and Master?"

"Eighteen ticals a month."

The mahout flushed with pleasure.

"Master, I agree to the wages," said he.

"That is good. The elephant is Poo Lorn."

Ai Kharn goggled. He continued to goggle while Check Lee briefly outlined his plans; but when the latter had finished speaking, the mahout had recovered his nerve. Poo Lorn would be utterly subdued by the terrible punishment he was about to receive, and he would then be in a position to bully the animal as much as he liked.

"Great One, I take the job," said he.

"Then all is arranged. And now, as I have told thee, we leave an hour before dawn."

Punctually at the hour mentioned, a strange little party stole out of the village in the cool dark that

precedes the dawn. The Chinaman and his secretary, mounted on Siamese ponies, went first. Then came Ah Fong, the cook, followed by Ai Kharn and four trusted runners. Resting in the worst heat of the day and sleeping at night in roughly made leaf shelters, they travelled for sixty hours, and then reached the river. Selecting a point some ten miles below the scene of the elephant's escape, they built rafts of bamboo and poled to the opposite bank. Near a small jungle village they made a temporary camp. Operations then began in earnest.

Firstly, Ai Kharn and the four runners went out to locate Poo Lorn. Careful as they were to avoid startling him, he winded them and gave chase over a short distance, but their legs were fleet and they soon shook him off. They hastened back with the news, whereupon Check Lee summoned the headman of the village. After much bargaining twenty men set out accompanied by the Chinaman's party. A large natural clearing was chosen a good mile from where Poo Lorn had been seen, and in this clearing a fifteen-foot pit was dug and covered with a cunning layer of bamboo fronds and leaves. Alongside they dug a smaller pit, which they left unconcealed. Then, bribed heavily by the Chinaman for the price of their silence, the villagers went back to their homes.

Check Lee shifted his camp to where the pits had been dug, and a series of skilful and daring operations was begun. Ai Kharn and the four runners, having located Poo Lorn again, took careful note of every wild animal path and the situation of every scalable tree in the vicinity, after which they approached the elephant and deliberately caused him to charge them. With him swinging along behind, they would dash down one of the



Poo Lorn crashed into the trap prepared for him.

paths, always leading him in the direction of the clearing. Should he gain too rapidly on them, they would skim up trees. While Poo Lorn raged round one of the refuges, the four men perched up the other trees would run on a few hundred yards.

This was repeated time and again, though on one occasion a runner was a fraction of a second late and the tip of Poo Lorn's trunk caught him. He paid the penalty with his life, but the others, urged on by promises of extra rewards, remained undaunted, and after two days' terrific energy the final scene opened.

Check Lee and his secretary and cook, perched in a machan in the fork of a huge tree, saw the four men rush into the clearing, with Poo Lorn close upon their heels. The men crossed the narrow space between the two pits, and Poo Lorn, swerving sharply to one side in order to avoid the open pit, promptly crashed into the trap prepared for him. The onlookers held their breath. Could they believe their eyes? Was Poo Lorn the Terrible really captured at last?

Reassured by the sound of muffled trumpeting, the three climbed down from the machan and peered down into the depths of the pit. Poo Lorn had not been killed by the fall, as often happens in such cases. He was very much alive, though he could move but little. Check Lee, as he gazed at his victim, smiled his evil smile; Ah Fong sucked his teeth; the men sang and danced in triumph; but Sang Noo, mindful of the fearful bellows coming from the pit, heartily wished himself back in the teak-house at Ban Tern.

Once Poo Lorn was completely in their power, the natural cruelty of the native came out. They hurled down stones upon Poo Lorn, prodded him

with pointed bamboo spears, flung blazing torches on to him, tormented him with fiendish skill. Never a drop of water nor a bale of fodder did they lower to him.

At first Poo Lorn strove mightily with his giant body. He tried with his tusks to dig away some of the earth, but his prison was too narrow. Also, every movement he made gave him red-hot agony in one of his hind legs, since a large tendon had been severely wrenched by the fall. He therefore soon abandoned all attempts at freeing himself, and merely bellowed with wrath.

After three days and nights of torment Poo Lorn was very weak. He lolled against the sides of the pit; his breath came in hoarse gasps, and he no longer bellowed. But his brain was still capable of thought; he had discovered that when he ceased showing his anger, so did the men above him cease their persecution. He now remained quiet and awaited events.

The Chinaman saw a helpless animal with its spirit completely broken. Accordingly he gave his men sharp orders and they set to work. They lowered water and fodder, which Poo Lorn accepted. Once, many years ago, he had refused food because he had not wished to surrender to man. Now he had grown cunning. The humans were strong while he was weak. He must eat and drink, regain his former health, then slay his hated enemies and escape.

While he chewed the fodder the men were busy widening the pit. After several hours' labour the sides of the trap sloped sufficiently for Poo Lorn to stagger out. As he stood on level ground once more, his appearance was pitiful. His massive body had grown so thin that the bones shone through the skin; his gait was feeble; his eyes were

glazed; his skin was torn and bleeding from a hundred different wounds; his injured leg still gave him agony. It was only through his immense strength that he had come out of the ordeal alive.

Ai Kharn, the mahout, approached him, while the others stood by with spears. Ai Kharn shrieked a command and dealt Poo Lorn a heavy blow on the forehead with a spiked iron goad. The blood spurted from the wound, ran down between the eyes and over the trunk, but never a sound did Poo Lorn make. He knelt obediently. The time would come later for his terrible revenge.

Ai Kharn mounted, but he had not ridden the elephant more than a few yards when Check Lee noticed a limp in the left hind leg. An inspection was made of the injury, and Ai Kharn dismounted to view it.

"The hurt. Is it bad?" inquired Check Lee.

"I think it take many moons before Poo Lorn is right again," answered the mahout, who understood elephants. "That tendon, it need much rest before Poo Lorn can do hard work."

The Chinaman swore violently, for he had in mind the capture of a huge herd of wild elephants on the other side of the border. The presence of such a huge tusker as Poo Lorn would be simply invaluable in taming the fiercer members of the herd, still—curses would not cure Poo Lorn. The elephant must be rested until the leg had healed of its own accord, but first he must get Poo Lorn over the border. Check Lee therefore gave Poo Lorn two days' rest. Then, regardless of his acute agony, he marched him over the border.

They came to Check Lee's camp, set in the wilds of Indo-China, where there were ex-dacoits, murderers, fierce swarthy men who would stop at nothing.

Poo Lorn, reeling with pain and weakness, was forced to kneel and receive the brand of Check Lee. The brands of the old teak company, made with a painless acid paste, still showed faintly on either hind-quarter. Over these Check Lee's great marks were printed, not by the merciful white man's method, but with white-hot iron.

The branding over, hobbles were put on Poo Lorn's forefeet and he was left to graze.

He was captured again by man, and by evil men to boot. He was thin, lame, and the strength had gone out of him; but one day it would return and a fearful vengeance would be his.

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CHAPTER XIV

POO LORN TURNS ROGUE

FOR ten months Poo Lorn remained grazing near the camp of the thieves, and gradually the flush of his old power stole through his frame and his injured tendon healed. Check Lee had given Ai Kharn strict orders not to work Poo Lorn, but only to mount him every day and ride him for an hour or two to keep him accustomed to the hand of man. Ai Kharn obeyed, but he took a delight in bullying and ill-treating his charge on every possible occasion. He used goad, dagger, bamboo splinters, even hot irons, in his effort to curb Poo Lorn's proud spirit, and never once did Poo Lorn try to resist. When the time was ripe the man would pay, but for the present Poo Lorn was content to wait.

Check Lee himself remained in the camp, for

he wished to keep in touch with the wild herd's movements. When Poo Lorn's leg was better, he sent out runners to begin rounding up the animals. This was difficult work, and it was only after two months that they succeeded in driving the herd towards the sources of a dry creek that ran from the distant hills towards the camp.

It had steep and unscalable banks, and under the Chinaman's direction a stout bamboo barrier, with points jutting inwards, was built across where the banks were steepest. Fifty yards farther up, round a bend, another fence was prepared. This was similar to the first, except that a twenty-foot opening was left in it. Above it hung a strong gate of thick timber studded with nails. This was slung to a cross beam, and could be dropped by cutting a rope tied to a neighbouring tree, in which Check Lee then took up his position.

A period of anxious waiting ensued. At last the herd, harried by a crowd of beaters with tom-toms and flares, came blundering down the creek. The elephants streamed through the opening, and the rope was cut. The elephants, rounding the bend, quickly came upon the second barrier, and thus found themselves trapped on all sides.

Poo Lorn, hobbled in the jungle a mile away, heard their trumpeting, and strange feelings stirred within him. The day after the capture, Ai Kharn and two coolies carrying ropes, stole up to him. They slipped off his hobbles, climbed his sides and rode him in the direction of the stockade.

Soon twelve other tame tuskers, all similarly mounted, swung into position behind Poo Lorn. At the closed gate they halted.

Inside the stockade the bewildered herd was marching up and down, vainly trying to discover some means of escape. Outside were crowds of

men-animals, all jabbering excitedly. The herd was a magnificent one, of twenty bulls, twice that number of cows and a fair sprinkling of calves; and with the arrival of the tame elephants great fun was to be expected.

Check Lee's instructions had been clear. The gate was to be raised and the tame tuskers were to enter and subdue the more troublesome members of the herd. This done, the men with ropes were to slip off the backs of their charges and noose the hind legs of the nearest. The noosed animal would then be pushed and prodded out of the enclosure and secured to a tree until it was thoroughly subdued. Thus had spoken Check Lee, and now, from the safety of a tall tree on which he was perched, he clapped his hands and signalled for the gate to be opened.

The fun began, though not quite in the manner expected by the humans. Owing to his size, Poo Lorn was the first to pass. Once inside, he knew his moment had come. He "swaid," and Ai Kharn was taken completely unawares. He and the two men with him fell sprawling on to the ground. Poo Lorn turned to savage them, but a wild tusker attacked him in the rear, and by the time he had brushed off his assailant the men had made good their escape.

Poo Lorn charged at the exit, but with a crash the gate snapped down into position, and he found himself trapped with the herd. Nothing daunted, he lunged at the gate. The iron nails hurt his trunk cruelly, and he drew back with a bellow. A stout post free of nails struck his attention, and he made for it. Though far beyond the strength of any normal elephant to uproot, it cracked and fell. With it the cross-beam gate collapsed.

Freedom now beckoned. Poo Lorn was in the

act of rushing through the exit when another tusker attacked him from behind, whereupon Poo Lorn went completely mad. Sheer anger blinded him, and instead of charging the humans outside, he turned and went roaring and bellowing through the flustered herd. Terrified, they gave way on either side of him. He reached the hidden fence round the corner. It bristled with spears, and he swung round again. A panic-stricken young tusker jabbed at him with its tusks, and Poo Lorn drove it before him.

Pandemonium broke out in the arena. Trumpetings, squealings, the stamping of great feet and jostling of huge bodies mingled in one gigantic storm of sound, while outside the upper end of the stockade an almost equal confusion prevailed. Mahouts, coolies and chainmen shrieked with alarm and sought trees. But many of them were too late to reach a position of safety. The herd, urged on by Poo Lorn, saw the opening in the fence ahead and surged through it. Check Lee's tame tuskers, sensing their danger, shook off their riders and fled up the creek. Mahouts and ropemen, as well as several coolies, were caught by the living torrent and trampled to death. Then, headed by the tame elephants and followed by Poo Lorn, the herd went roaring up the dry river bed for mile upon mile.

When the banks flattened, the herd spread itself out in the jungle. They squealed, rapped, and finally resumed their interrupted grazing. Check Lee's twelve tuskers flapped enormous ears of relief and settled down comfortably to their newly found freedom. As for Poo Lorn, when the madness left him he made his way back along the creek. There were several more little matters to be attended to before he took a well-earned rest.

But Ai Kharn and the Chinaman had been too quick for him. As soon as the herd had disappeared, the mahout had shrieked warning from the tree he had scaled. Poo Lorn would return and seek vengeance, he cried.

The survivors thereupon fled to the nearest river, where they set hastily about building bamboo rafts. As the Chinaman supervised the work his face was mottled with rage. He had spent countless money; he had lost not only the herd itself, but his twelve best tuskers into the bargain; many of his followers had been injured or killed outright, and his forest camp had ceased to exist. Check Lee spat viciously and vowed to leave elephants alone in the future. He would find his way back to Ban Tern and bleed the simple native villagers: this, at any rate, gave a reasonable profit at no risk to life or limb.

As a distant trumpet sounded, the men burst into feverish activity, for Poo Lorn had evidently tracked them down. They launched the rafts, sprang on to them and poled frantically downstream. The little fleet rounded a bend as Poo Lorn broke out of the forest and stood upon the bank.

He glared after them and bellowed with disappointment when they disappeared from view. Then, since he could not follow, he rolled into the forest again and began to graze.

The hatred of years smouldered in him as he tore at the luscious foliage. Was he never to be left alone, free and unhindered, to enjoy peace? In his hatred, the dislike of any particular individual was swallowed up by one huge hatred of mankind as a whole. No longer would he wait for humans to come to him; he would seek them out of his own accord; he would rend and destroy whatever human habitations chanced to cross his path: thus would a fearful revenge be his.

Poo Lorn moved slowly through the forest. He had turned rogue at last. In the period known as the Three Years' Terror that followed, the fame of Poo Lorn was to spread to the four corners of the earth. In places as far apart as London and San Francisco, Cape Town and Montreal, men were soon to read of his activities and marvel greatly. But Poo Lorn knew nothing of telegrams. He knew only that from now on his one aim in life was to destroy the work of man. Sullen, magnificent, he moved forward through the jungle mazes towards the dwellings of his unsuspecting enemies.

PART III

CHAPTER XV

THE TERROR BEGINS

Poo LORN recrossed the border and travelled slowly south-west. He did not know whither his course would take him, for this part of the country was new to him. Day after day went by without a sign of human habitation, but he did not hurry.

On a rainy morning in July he arrived at the railway line from Bangkok to Lakon Lampang, a distance of some four hundred miles. For the first two hundred miles the line ribboned through flat paddy-fields, then rose and fell over the forest-clad hills of Northern Siam.

From the depths of this jungle Poo Lorn peered at the track, which he knew instinctively to be the work of man. Then an extraordinary thing happened. An enormous monster, the size of fifty elephants in one, came shrieking and bellowing along the line. For the first time in his life Poo Lorn knew fear and turned and fled. After putting a good two miles between him and the monster, he paused and listened. Evidently it had not followed him, for he could hear its distant rumble far away to the north. His curiosity now thoroughly aroused, he returned to the line. Soon another train passed. He bolted again; but when a third puffed by he stood his ground, for he had noticed that these monsters never turned aside to pursue him. They kept to the man-made path.

By sundown several more had passed his hiding-place, and Poo Lorn had learnt a lot. In some of them he had seen men seated. His curiosity having become overwhelming, he burst out from his screen of leaves and marched boldly along the sleepers.

On rounding a corner he came to a siding where several young monsters reposed. He approached them cautiously. They did not bolt, nor did they show sign of attacking him. He therefore felt one gingerly with the tip of his trunk. It was cold, and an idea dawned on him: men could make dead things live, and live when they still were dead. At their behest, stones, sticks, goads, and all manner of objects moved as if alive.

These young monsters were obviously some such product, and should be destroyed.

Bending his head, he heaved mightily at the nearest truck. To his surprise it did not fall over like a house. It ran away from him. For a moment Poo Lorn was rooted to the spot in astonishment, not knowing that the truck, which happened to be an empty one, stood on the crest of a gentle slope. A dead thing had come to life and fled from him in terror.

When he had recovered from his surprise he saw that the truck had stopped. The innate spirit of mischief in the heart of every wild elephant caused him to shuffle after it. He gave it another push, with the result that the truck, reaching a steeper portion of the slope, ran out of the siding on to the main line and disappeared round a bend.

Poo Lorn made no attempt to pursue it: it ran too fast for him. Accordingly, he looked round for any other damage he could do. Several tall posts, ran parallel to the railway line, but of what use they were he could not fathom, since no houses

rested upon their tops. Still, they were made by man and down they would come.

Crack! A telegraph post fell at right angles across the rails, and Poo Lorn snorted with dismay. A thin, sinuous object was writhing round him. With his trunk he freed himself from the wires and then, seeing that no further danger threatened from them, he made for a second post. The crash of the fall was drowned by another and mightier crash that came echoing up from down the line. A moment later a shrieking and hissing smote Poo Lorn's ears. Leaving the telegraph poles, he cut through the jungle to investigate.

Arrived at a point opposite the noise, Poo Lorn beheld an amazing scene. The young monster he had recently pushed was derailed and a goods train lay over on its side. The hiss of escaping steam was deafening, and agitated Siamese ran hither and thither, shouting at the top of their voices.

Suddenly Poo Lorn charged, and the humans, none of whom had been killed by the accident, rushed into the wall of forest bordering the opposite side of the line. Poo Lorn, left alone with the train, approached the wrecked engine. The monster was still alive, for it snorted and hissed. He lunged at it and his trunk touched the hot boiler. He squealed in agony and retreated a few paces. Then a fresh shrieking and hissing broke out from somewhere up the line. Leaving the shattered engine, he moved towards this new sound.

An express, warned in time by a shouting coolie, had drawn up. Long rows of agitated faces peered out of the carriage windows. Poo Lorn gazed earnestly at this strange spectacle. Should he attack this new monster, which was larger than any he had seen before, or should he not? He

paused, and then from one of the carriages there emerged a white man.

Now Poo Lorn knew nothing of rifles. He had been shot at only in the dark, and as he saw the rifle pointed straight at him, he thought it to be of no more significance than a goad or a bamboo spear. He charged the white man. A deafening report rang out and a thunderbolt hit his forehead. Blood streamed over eyes and trunk. Dazed, half blinded, Poo Lorn lost all sense of direction, but chance made him reel sideways into the forest. Through it he blundered for miles, knocking down trees, bamboo clumps, everything that came into his path.

Darkness fell and gradually Poo Lorn returned to his senses. By raising his head for the charge, he had deflected the bullet from skull and brain. It had merely furrowed through the thick gristle of the bump below his forehead and then expended itself harmlessly in the air. But the wound still smarted painfully and served as a grim warning that men with guns were to be left severely alone.

Poo Lorn had learnt several other lessons that day. Trains, for instance, even when disabled, should never be attacked. They were capable of retaliating in an unexpected manner. But empty trucks and telegraph poles were harmless and could be destroyed with ease. Also, unless the opportunity were too good to miss, he must confine his destroying work to the night hours, as at Ban Tern. He would therefore harass the railway line only after sunset.

By the following morning, beyond a slight throb in the forehead, Poo Lorn was himself again. He grazed peacefully, till the scent of humans, both white and brown, came down the wind. They were tracking him, he knew full well. Now that he had

openly declared himself the enemy of every human, the latter would not be slow to retaliate.

Poo Lorn brought cunning to his aid. Instead of seeking out his foes and charging them, he withdrew into the thickest part of a huge clump of bamboos. They snapped back into position, concealing him completely. From this hiding-place he saw and heard men creeping round the clump. There were two whites, both armed with rifles, and a collection of brown coolies. They evidently guessed at his whereabouts, but could not see him. No one being inclined to walk into that thick maze, in which an unseen death might lurk, they withdrew. Poo Lorn waited till night, then emerged from the clump and swept noiselessly through the dripping gloom.

At dawn, after a refreshing bath in a jungle stream, he made for the railway line, which he reached at a point some ten miles above the scene of the accident. He had intended to wait till dark, but the sight of a small station caused him to change his mind. It consisted of a strip of sandy platform bordered by a long wooden building. Behind this reposed a tiny native hamlet. An air of peace hung over the spot and no danger could threaten.

Poo Lorn's first object was the stationmaster, who, clad in khaki uniform and a red-banded hat, was sucking a twig outside his office. The line was blocked—no trains were to run that day—and he had been ordered to stand by and await instructions. The job suited him. He chewed his twig; then, suddenly, he swallowed it and fled for the village.

The wooden building crashed to earth and Poo Lorn shuffled straight at the hamlet. The stationmaster, followed by the whole of the population,

fled into the forest, where he lost what remained of his uniform. Poo Lorn, somewhat tired after his exertions, made no attempt to chase the fugitives. He seemed, indeed, to prefer destroying men's work to killing them. In the end he went back to the jungle, where he settled down to graze.

A week passed quietly, though Poo Lorn remained always alert for any possible attack. Surprise aided him against human beings; it also helped them in tracking him down. He therefore made a practice of making wide detours every few hours to snuff the breeze from every direction; and, since an elephant can wind a man up to a distance of three whole miles, he received ample warning of hostile approach.

The rainy season, too, aided him greatly. The jungle was now one dense mass of tangled vegetation. Long coarse grass, writhing creepers and bushes of thorns, tumbled and tossed between the mighty forest trees and gave Poo Lorn a secure lair that stretched for hundreds of square miles north, east, south and west. Thus he was able to graze at leisure until the urge for mischief assailed him again.

After eight days' rest he stalked through the forest, intent on action. By evening he scented many humans, and this time he waited till long after dark before making any close investigation. He came upon a large natural clearing in which numbers of men were camped. Fires blazed merrily. Two big tents of the type he had seen white men use were pitched at one end of the clearing. At the other end rows of dark coolies slept. And in the middle of the open space a huge pit, partially concealed by bamboos, had been dug.

Poo Lorn had never forgotten the pit into which he had fallen, and the sight set him boiling with

rage. He trumpeted shrilly and some guards posted round the clearing yelled a warning. He shambled at the large tents, and the white men inside, surprised by darkness and with no time to grab their rifles, beat a hurried exit. Poo Lorn tore the tents to ribbons, smashed all they contained into one hopeless mass, then turned towards the coolie lines. He trod carefully now for any hidden snags, and found to his surprise that most of the men had sought refuge in the pit itself. Thus the astonishing spectacle was seen of man being trapped by elephant, not elephant by man.

Poo Lorn could have rained down missiles upon his enemies after the manner of his earlier tormentors, but this was beyond his intelligence. He stormed round the edges of the pit, and eventually, since he could not reach the men below, stalked off into the jungle and was lost in the gloom.

The whites came out of their hiding-places, fished about in the ruins, and unearthed a pair of useless rifles.

"We're up against something now, old chap," said the taller of the two. He was a forest officer in the service of the Siamese Government, and he knew something of elephants.

"Is this an elephant or a devil?" the railway official answered him.

"A bit of both, I should say. I reckon we're going to hear some more of him before he finishes with us."

The forest officer was right. In the months that followed Poo Lorn did untold damage to the railway line. Working only by night, he tore up sleepers, overturned trucks, and pulled down telegraph poles. By December, when the brief period of cold weather set in, a veritable reign of terror

was established up-country. Telegraphic communication between Bangkok and the two great towns of the north, Kangmai and Lakon Lampang, was being constantly interrupted. The night expresses could no longer run, and where the journey from Bangkok to Lakon Lampang could formerly be completed in less than two days, trains proceeded with the utmost caution and were lucky if they reached their destination in a week.

The Kamoo coolies who patrolled the line in search of landslides and fallen trees threw up their lonely jobs and bolted. Breakdown gangs, permanent-way coolies and bridge repairers deserted in scores, leaving the officials in despair.

The telegraph wires, when they were in working order, hummed busily. In Bangkok and Lakon Lampang those who had charge of the smooth running of the railway tore their hair and spent sleepless nights. Forest officers, gendarmes, even detachments of Royal Siamese soldiery were sent out after the elephant. Heavy rifles, arrows, concealed pits, tame elephants, even poisons smeared on likely foliage, were employed; but Poo Lorn remained uncaptured. His immense strength and almost devilish luck and cunning enabled him to elude every attempt to surround him.

When the hot weather arrived, Poo Lorn quitted the country and made for his secret destination far away in the north. The Siam jungle, burnt bare by the fiery sun, was now too open to conceal him, and he knew that if he remained near the railway his days of life and liberty were numbered. The long journey completed, he grazed in his mysterious haunts during the whole of the dry season. Down in Siam trains resumed their normal services and men congratulated one another that the elephant

had either been killed or had ceased his activities for good and all.

Certain authorities thought otherwise, however; and thus, one hot morning in April, Richard Cairns received an urgent summons to attend a conference in Lakon Lampang.

CHAPTER XVI

A CONFERENCE IS HELD

RICHARD CAIRNS had been a worried man these past few months. For he and Elise both felt sure that the rogue must be none other than Poo Lorn.

Elise was anxious because of little Elise, now aged twenty months. Though Poo Lorn's operations had taken place far away from Ban Tern, she was afraid.

Her husband was worried for a different reason. He did not believe that Poo Lorn would visit Ban Tern again, but he did believe that it was through him that the elephant had turned rogue. By his long chase he had caused the country much suffering. In vain Elise had pointed out that over a year had elapsed before Poo Lorn had begun harrying the railway line. Cairns considered himself guilty of a crime against both man and beast, and he had reported his suspicion that the elephant might be Poo Lorn. Now, as he read the summons, he guessed that the authorities wished him to take an active part in the work of bringing Poo Lorn to bay; and he would be bound to help them.

"Dick," Elise said, "you haven't forgotten your promise to me, have you?"

"But you wouldn't keep me to that promise

now?" he cried. "We have the whole country to consider."

Elise was not one to make her husband shirk his duties. But in the matter of Poo Lorn she was adamant.

"I don't believe for a minute you had anything to do with Poo Lorn turning rogue," she argued. "Besides, how do you think you're going to help? Haven't we heard that forest officers who've lived in the jungle for years have tried to trap Poo Lorn without the slightest success? If they have failed, why should you do any better?"

"Still, it's up to me to have a shot at him."

"It's not. But get into your riding-kit, quick. You'll be able to tell them lots of useful things about Poo Lorn."

Cairns hated being thought a coward, but he mounted his pony, waved a cheerful farewell, and galloped along the dusty cart-road towards the capital.

At the conference there were forest officers both white and Siamese, police officers, railway authorities, several European merchants from Bangkok, and numerous lesser lights.

Richard Cairns was the first to be called upon.

"Mr. Cairns," said the chairman, "we understand that this elephant is supposed to have been once in the service of your firm. Will you please tell us all you know about him?"

"Thank you, Mr. Cairns," said the Siamese chairman, as he ended. "Though, of course, you cannot be blamed, you may be indirectly responsible."

"That's what I'm afraid of, sir."

"I doubt it," one of the forest officers said.

"Apparently more than a year elapsed before the elephant took it into his head to attack. In the

meantime some one else may have had a go at him. Elephant-thieves, for instance, or some native chief who's kept the matter quiet."

A pause followed; then a merchant broke in.

"Mr. Cairns knows the brute better than anyone else. What does he suggest?"

"Beyond what has already been done, I don't see that I can suggest anything," answered Cairns.

"Can't suggest anything?" The merchant banged his fist on the table. "But trade's suffering badly. If we use river transport instead of the railway, it's a matter of weeks getting stores up and down the country. Then take the state of the telegraph service. We can't even rely on that. Never heard of such a thing. What'll other nations think? The Lao country isolated from Siam by the doings of one elephant! Preposterous! We can't have this sort of thing."

The chairman coughed. "Mr. Trevor," he said, "might tell us briefly some of the methods he has adopted in trying to kill or capture the elephant."

The forest officer complied, but the merchant remained unsatisfied.

"But surely an elephant's *big* enough," he complained. "It's not like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"It is not," agreed Trevor. "It's like looking for a needle in the hundred haystacks. Northern Siam consists of roughly forty thousand square miles of forest. The railway runs for at least two hundred miles through this forest. Poo Lorn can strike at any point he likes, and when he likes, and when the hot weather comes he disappears. Where to, goodness knows."

"You've got plenty of men and coolies."

"That's where you're wrong, sir. Of late we've hardly had a soul to assist us. We get no informa-

tion out of the jungle villagers. They think that if they tell he'll take vengeance. They look upon him now as a god, and it's the same with the forest hunters and trackers. In spite of huge rewards, hardly a man comes forward."

"Then make 'em come by force," growled the merchant.

"As regards what we ourselves have done," continued Trevor, ignoring this absurd remark, "I hope all gentlemen present will realise that we are up against a beast that knows man—a far tougher proposition than any rogue wild elephant."

"Why," cried the merchant, "one might think that the brute could almost *reason*."

"Why can't it?"

"Why can't it! No animal can reason. They've only got instinct."

"Instinct!" breathed the second F.O. "That is a useful name for what we can't understand. Possibly animals can't reason, but I've known tiger and panther show the most extraordinary cunning, and I believe they've got some kind of intelligence of which we haven't the ghost of an idea. Poo Lorn, too, has this to a very marked degree, and——"

"Gentlemen," the chairman interrupted, "the conference met to devise some plan for the elephant's capture. Perhaps, as Mr. Cairns knows Poo Lorn, he will make another attempt at rounding up the animal."

Richard Cairns rose to his feet, and the eyes of everyone were upon him.

"I'm afraid I must refuse, sir," he said steadily.

The chairman shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, of course, I can't *make* you, Mr. Cairns. But I should have thought——"

"Mr. Cairns, sir," broke in Trevor, "has a wife and child."

"Ah!" said the chairman significantly. The merchant from Bangkok flung up his hands in despair.

Cairns flushed. "My decision has nothing to do with my wife," he said quickly.

"I beg to differ from Mr. Cairns," Trevor said. "I've met him once or twice in the jungle, and know him to be almost without fear. I think he has shown this just now in a somewhat convincing manner."

A hum of approval went round the assembly. It takes a brave man to face a charge of cowardice.

"Some years ago," continued Trevor, "I heard that Poo Lorn saved the life of a girl. That girl was Elise Morrison. She is now Mrs. Richard Cairns."

"Mr. Cairns," said the Siamese courteously, "I quite understand. Please accept my sincere apologies for having caused you pain."

Cairns reddened still further and resumed his seat.

"Well," the chairman observed, "we're not much nearer the capture of Poo Lorn than we were an hour ago. We must have some plan of action ready before the elephant returns to his old tricks, as I'm sure he will, directly the rains have broken."

"We must send for Clissen and Redhill," said Trevor. "Clissen is in Africa, I believe, and Redhill in the Malay States. But they'll come to us, I'm certain."

The forest officer had reason for this remark. Clissen and Redhill were two of the most famous big-game hunters in the world.

The proposal of Trevor was carried, and after various preparations had been made for the guarding of the railway, the conference broke up.

CHAPTER XVII

CAIRNS SUSPECTS CHECK LEE

THE south-west monsoon roared and lashed over the tree-tops, bringing rain and yet more rain over the hills from the distant sea. Cairns returned one gloomy morning from an inspection trip, to find Elise awaiting him at the top of the bungalow steps.

"And now," said she, "I'm going to show you I don't always try to keep you out of danger."

"Why? What's the matter?" he asked.

"Listen. A native has just arrived saying that a man-eating tiger is harrying his village. He wants you to help him, and I think you ought to go."

A brown Lao told them that the inhabitants of his village, which lay three days' journey away to the north-east, lived in fear and trembling, as during the last fortnight a tiger had seized and carried off two men and a woman from their midst. Would the white lord condescend to come to the aid of his humble servants?

Cairns responded with alacrity. He seized his heavy rifle, and, accompanied by some carrier coolies, set out at once on the dangerous adventure. Arrived at the village, he camped near it and began the tracking of the man-eater. But the tiger appeared to be another Poo Lorn for cunning, and after a week's fruitless efforts, as a last resort, he ordered the villagers to dig a concealed pit.

To his surprise the men informed him that a huge pit already existed some eight miles from their habitation. The pit, they said, would require re-levelling to a certain extent, but once this had been

done it would serve excellently for the purpose of trapping the tiger.

Cairns knew the inherent laziness of the native. The pit of which they spoke was too distant from the scene of the tiger's activities, and so he ordered them to dig a new pit in a suitable clearing nearby. But his curiosity was aroused. While they were



The killer leapt up at the sides of its prison.

employed at this task, he took a guide and plunged through the forest. He came to the remains of a crater large enough to trap the biggest elephant, and returning thoughtfully to the villagers, he asked them the reason for the old pit's existence. They professed complete ignorance. Cairns saw that they were lying, and concentrated on the capture of the

tiger. With the man-eater slain, information of value might be forthcoming.

Cairns got that tiger. Attracted by a live bait tied to a stump in the ground, it crashed into the trap made by the villagers, and Cairns, descending from his machan, raised his rifle. On seeing him the killer leapt up at the sides of its prison in a flaring paroxysm of rage, only to fall back dead a moment later, shot through the head.

The carcass was carried in triumph to the village, and a celebration was held. Bonfires were lit, round which the inhabitants danced and sang. Much palm-toddy was consumed, and tongues wagged freely. Cairns questioned cleverly, and he learnt that a Chinaman had been responsible for the digging of the huge pit he had seen.

"Ha!" said Cairns. "And what happened then?"

"Lord," answered one of the villagers, "we know not. We only *heard* that a great wild elephant, the size of a hundred bulls, was captured and taken away secretly in the night."

"In what year did this happen?"

"It was the Year of the Rat, when the great hot weather prevailed."

Cairns marched back to Ban Tern. So this particular elephant had been captured about the same time as he himself had chased Poo Lorn. He would pay Check Lee a visit on his way to the bungalow.

In the Chinaman's teak house Richard Cairns was offered tea, which he refused. He told Check Lee of certain information that had reached his ears; then: "That elephant was Poo Lorn," he concluded in icy tones.

"It was a wild elephant," smiled the other. "A very big wild elephant, true, but assuredly not P-

Lorn. For did I not know Poo Lorn in the days of your father-in-law?"

"Whether the elephant was Poo Lorn or not, perhaps Check Lee would tell me what happened to the animal."

"I sold it to a native chief over the Indo-China border," answered the Chinaman blandly.

"And how long was the elephant in Check Lee's service before he sold it?"

The Chinaman paused before replying, for he saw that his visitor was endeavouring to lead him into a trap.

"Mr. Cairns is very curious about this elephant," he parried.

"He is. And if you have no evil to hide, why should you not answer me?"

"I sold the elephant a few moons after I had captured it."

"But why the haste?"

"I had my reasons, Mr. Cairns."

The white man was now almost certain of his facts. After about a year the elephant had escaped. These dates coincided with the sudden return of the Chinaman to Ban Tern and the first havoc wrought by Poo Lorn on the railway a month or so later.

Yet where was proof to be found? All that Cairns could do would be to report his suspicions and thus relieve his own conscience. Beyond that, Check Lee was no nearer imprisonment than before. Cairns swore inwardly and swung on his heel.

"Mr. Cairns," the Chinaman's voice followed him, "it would be well if you attended to your business and left me to mine." The words were as smooth as silk, but a hidden threat lay in them.

The white man did not reply. He pushed aside the fawning Sang Noo and strode up to his bungalow.

"I've shot the tiger, and found out something about Check Lee," he told his wife.

"And I've news, too," she said soberly. "Poo Lorn has returned to the country and caused a ghastly railway accident. A price of twenty thousand ticals has been put on his head, and the whole of the capital is beside itself with fright. Oh, Dick, when is all this horror going to come to an end?"

Richard Cairns's eyes blazed.

"And there sits the devil that's the cause of it all!" he cried. "Not content with bleeding the local people, he brings this new disaster to the country. The man's guilty, and I'd like to see him crushed under the feet of the very beast he made turn rogue."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE END OF THE TERROR

CLISSEN was in Mombasa when he received the request of the Siamese Government, and he hastened to respond to the call. Redhill, too, left post-haste for Siam. Both men arrived in the same week at Bangkok, but not till the rains were nearly over.

Meanwhile Poo Lorn had caused more and more alarm throughout the country. Isolated villages were raided, and in spite of every precaution, further damage was done to the railway. He would let weeks go by without a sign of him, then out he would come, a huge shadow darker than the night, and strike at some point of the line miles away from the spot where he had last appeared. Thus the

officials were always kept guessing as to what his next move would be.

Poo Lorn's reputation was by now tremendous. In the jungle hamlets mothers frightened piccanninies into obedience by the mere mention of his name; whole villages made a practice of placing offerings in the shape of rice and fruit outside their stockades in the hopes that Poo Lorn would leave them unmolested; even the scattered white population almost came to believe the natives' tales that Poo Lorn was a god in disguise, for the wildest stories were told, and the elephant was credited with many acts which were totally beyond his strength to accomplish.

Clissen and Redhill refused all offers in the shape of tame elephants and regal camp equipments. They had eyes like hawks, and could shadow, track and shoot better than any native living. A large number of camp followers would merely serve to hamper them, they said: they required only four coolies to carry the barest necessities of life.

With these men they set out for the north. The rains having cleared, the jungle was beginning to dry up. Day after day they stalked through the forest bordering the railway line, sometimes working together, more often apart. They brought to the tracking of Poo Lorn all their immense skill and experience. Eventually they triumphantly shot a vast elephant. But as, in spite of their theories, this was not Poo Lorn, their triumph made no appreciable difference to his progress.

When the next rains broke, Poo Lorn returned to his beloved railway, but found that all manner of devices had been placed along the line. Bamboo spears about six inches high hurt his feet cruelly. In some places deep trenches had been dug parallel

to the track. An elephant can ford rivers and negotiate mountains, but a ditch will stop it completely, because no elephant can jump.

After several narrow escapes Poo Lorn resolved to abandon the railway for good and all. He went at random through the forest in a northerly direction till by chance he struck the only road in the Lao country. This ran from the head of the railway at Lakon Lampang to Chiengrai, the last outpost on the borders of Northern Siam, and it was thus the sole link between Siam and the various Shan and Indo-Chinese states.

Along this road, fringed by two hundred miles of virgin jungle, strange dusky tribes, trading in foxskins, walnuts, jungle-cloth, and tobacco, met one another for the first time. Black Kamoos, with white headbands and bags of rice rolled round their waists, padded along from their mountain homes in search of work in the Siam teak forests. Fierce yellow Haws, armed with swords and blunderbusses and accompanied by black-coated, black-tongued Chow dogs, drove caravans of mules laden with produce to sell at the railway head. Turbaned Shans, long-garbed brown Burmese, placid Laos, meek Leus and Karens, one and all went up and down the highway on their lawful and unlawful occasions. Sometimes small crazy motor omnibuses, carrying passengers and light articles, went snorting by them, scattering pack bullocks, mules, ponies and dogs in all directions. The passengers grinned and the caravan drivers yelled. Then the frightened animals collected again with tinkling of bells and creaking of girths, and the processions moved forward, bound for the noisy stench of the market-place at Lakon.

Poo Lorn reached the road where it climbs over a steep pass to the water-shed of the Mae Huat.

On the left towered huge walls of rock, their lower slopes covered with thick vegetation. To the right, on the farther side of the road, a precipice fell sheer to the tree-mantled River Mae Huat.

Concealed in the tangle near the foot of the rocks, he watched the road. Presently a monster, much smaller than those on the railway, came fussing up the incline. Poo Lorn charged it in broad daylight. The driver could not put on speed and the road was too narrow to turn. He jammed on his brakes and leapt out. The passengers speedily followed and fled in a yelling mob down the hill. Poo Lorn heaved the deserted bus over the precipice.

The road proved a good deal easier to raid than the railway line. One bus company after another closed down; caravan traders ceased their activities. In a few months the highway was serving only as a path for tiger and panther.

When the cold weather arrived Poo Lorn had had enough of vengeance. He had taught the humans a terrible lesson, and now he would leave them alone for ever. He moved at leisure through the forest on a line parallel with the empty road, grazing and bathing as he went; but after a few days he came to the borders of the biggest village he had ever seen. Ahead of him lay a vast stretch of paddy-fields, now covered with dry stubble, for the month was early January and the harvest already gathered. Behind rose the prongs of temples and the thatches of countless houses. Between the fields and the houses a black mass of men had assembled.

Poo Lorn was gazing upon the outskirts of Lakon Lampang. Naturally he did not know this, but he did know that here a magnificent opportunity presented itself. He was thirty-five years of age and in the very prime of his strength. Like every other

big tusker, he was fully aware of his own importance, and his easy victories on the Chiengrai road had made him over-confident. For two and a half years he had stalked the country, driving and scattering the men-animals in much the same manner as a giant disturbs nests of ants. Poo Lorn, as he gazed at the distant throngs, held them in utter contempt.

Curiosity and the desire to do mischief overwhelmed him. His resolve to quit raiding vanished. He grunted and threw dust over himself, then noiselessly muffled over the playing-fields, embarking on the most talked-of episode of his career.

The cause of the throng is easily explained. The yearly Christmas meeting of the up-country teak-wallahs was in progress, an event widely known throughout the district. In the club grounds on the borders of the paddy-fields all manner of games would be fought out, notably a hotly contested game of polo. This year a very high Personage indeed had consented to present the cup to the winning team.

This Personage was sent up from Bangkok by the King of Siam on a general tour of the north, to report on trade and local government. He had also been directed to bring information about Poo Lorn's activities.

The news had attracted thousands of natives to the club grounds, and the scene sparkled with life and colour. A huge marquee had been erected, and from chairs along the edge of the field the notabilities watched the game in progress. The very high Personage wore the uniform of a Siamese general, and his breast glittered with a marvellous array of medals. Next to him were his personal staff and their ladies in beautiful green, red or blue panungs

of matchless silk. Near these sat some of the teak-wallahs not actually engaged in the polo. Richard Cairns and Elise sat in their company, while little Elise, now nearly four, struggled with her Lao ayah in a frantic endeavour to crumple her spotless new frock. A few missionaries and consuls and their wives completed the white company.

Behind the chairs Siamese gendarmes, clothed in khaki and solemnity, kept order among the mobs of excited Laos, Burmese, Shans, Indians and Chinese.

The game was waxing fast and furious. The click of the stick on the bamboo ball, the thunder of galloping hooves, and the evening sun combined to please both eye and ear.

Then Poo Lorn arrived. How he came near the throng without someone giving a warning yell nobody knew. In the main the crowd were too interested in the meeting to give a thought to what took place behind them, while the few natives who did happen to see Poo Lorn approaching promptly threw themselves flat on the ground in abject fear.

Poo Lorn burst into the polo field and trumpeted, whereupon the meeting ended in a scene of indescribable confusion. The polo ponies, scared by this giant creature, bolted in all directions, and so did the crowd. The very high Personage found himself running side by side with sweating coolies and ragged Indian pedlars. Cairns, carrying his child on one arm and leading Elise with the other, got them unscathed through the mob and into a large bungalow belonging to one of the teak companies. The remainder of the crowd escaped, and by the time Poo Lorn arrived at the marquee the whole of the club enclosure had emptied.

The marquee required attention. He pulled it down and trod it savagely to a shapeless wreck.

This done, Poo Lorn made for a small well he had noticed at one side of the field. He drank, squirted water over his back, and then, as if utterly disdainful of the humans he had routed, rested under the shade of a spreading banyan tree.

By now the crowds had sorted themselves out to a certain extent. Most of the natives had bolted to their homes, while the whites, together with the Siamese nobleman and his followers, had assembled in the Umphur's large house. There a hurried consultation had taken place, as a result of which several heavy rifles had been produced from some of the neighbouring bungalows.

"And now," said the nobleman, who, like every educated Siamese, spoke perfect English, "for goodness' sake let's have the elephant shot. Here's our chance at last."

To his surprise, the spokesman of a group of teak-wallahs coughed and fidgeted.

"We'll go out, sir, but we can't guarantee to shoot Poo Lorn unless he attacks us."

"What!" cried the astonished nobleman, scarce able to believe his ears.

Briefly the other explained. They, the teak-wallahs, lived amongst elephants, and it was their proud boast that never had they laid one of these great animals low in the dust. Indeed, they did not even know the vital shot to the brain that is necessary to kill the elephant outright. There was a danger, therefore, that Poo Lorn might only be wounded and thus goaded to further destruction.

"We must risk that," answered the nobleman.

"But think, sir. Poo Lorn has never killed save in self-defence. He may have gone for the railway line and the Chiengrai road, but what's that to do with us teak-wallahs? I reckon it's for the Government to settle him, not us."

For a while the Siamese stared incredulously at the speaker, then the truth dawned on him. Here was an example of what the white race called "sport," and his quick wit took in the humour of the situation. He put back his head and laughed and laughed.

"Still, Poo Lorn must be shot," said he, relapsing into gravity. "Let's go to the edge of the fields and have a look at him. But first, will you teak fellows promise to shoot if he charges us?"

"We will," they agreed.

Poo Lorn was still under his tree, and the wonder of him left the spectators speechless. Here at last towered the great animal who for years had fought a lone battle with a nation. Sublime, unconquerable, he loomed high above the pygmies he had put to rout.

Natives tiptoed fearfully towards him, and soon long lines of brown figures were crouching on the dusty road outside the field. The figures swayed, bowed, straightened. A queer high-pitched chant rose in unison. They called Poo Lorn "My Lord King"; they begged him to take pity on his servants and depart in peace; they prayed also for his happiness and well-being. They were quite sincere: not one of them wished to kill him. A god before, he was a god of gods to them now.

Only the slightest of movements came from some of the watching teak-wallahs. Richard Cairns had silently joined them, carrying a pair of field-glasses. Through them he gazed at the massive figure. He whispered to a companion and passed the glasses on. When three or four had looked through them a stir of anticipation went round the crowd. Poo Lorn was moving from beneath the tree.

The elephant walked straight towards the road.

The memory of his old grazing grounds beyond Ban Tern had called, for there the glades were cool and water abounded. In these grounds he would remain for the rest of his days, only quitting them occasionally in order to make his secret journeys to the north.

Though the grounds were many miles away, and he in a strange town, his wonderful sense of direction guided him unerringly. He swung out on to the road and passed through the onlookers. The latter made no attempt to run. The simpler folk prostrated themselves on the edges of the road, while the white men and the nobleman and his retinue stood stiffly with their arms at their sides, fascinated. The greatest living creature in the whole of Asia passed them by without a glance to left or right.

His way took him through the market-place. There the chatter stilled. Man, woman and child bowed low in the dust. Poo Lorn the Terrible, their Lord King, was pleased to use their humble thoroughfare as a path for his mighty feet. They pressed the palms of their hands together and bowed low.

The broad track dwindled to a rough cart-road. The jungle leapt up in a living wall of green. Poo Lorn plunged into the jungle, heading north-east for his grazing grounds. In the distance there sounded the beating of drums by the men he utterly despised.

All that night the market-place was astir. Flares hissed over swarthy faces and flashing teeth; drums and gongs rolled out messages and salutations. The day had brought good omens. By his behaviour it appeared that the god-like Poo Lorn had shown his majesty for the last time : henceforth he

would leave his subjects in peace. The drums rolled messages of joy; they rolled also salutes to the great animal the population worshipped. Incense burned, candles were lit, and men chanted till the grey dawn swept the night across the hills.

In a large bungalow on the outskirts of the town Richard Cairns lay awake until the small hours. He had proof and witnesses at last. Check Lee, body-snatcher, elephant-thief and baby-killer, was nearing the end of his career of crime, and the long arms of the law would soon enfold him. For Cairns had seen through his field-glasses the well-known brand of Check Lee marked on either flank of Poo Lorn, and beneath these brands had showed the fainter markings of his own teak company. Clear proof was now available that the Chinaman had stolen the elephant for unlawful purposes.

Richard Cairns's eyes glinted. In the arrest of Check Lee he owed a duty not only to his firm, but to the entire community.

CHAPTER XIX

THE TRIAL AND REVENGE OF CHECK LEE

CAIRNS did not return immediately to his forest after the meeting. Instead, he had conversations with police officers, consuls and native lawyers. All knew the evil reputation of Check Lee, the Chinaman, and agreed that a chance offered of bringing the miscreant to jail. Several independent witnesses had seen the brand of Check Lee over the fainter brand of the white man's firm. The charge would be that Check Lee, knowing the animal belonged

to the teak company, had captured it for his own purposes. If found guilty, the Chinaman would receive a severe sentence, for the stealing of an elephant was regarded by the Court as an extremely serious offence.

A warrant was got out and the police acted quickly lest the Chinaman should flee for the China border. Gendarmes were sent in secret to Ban Tern, and returned bringing Check Lee with them.

At once the complicated business of collecting witnesses began. Check Lee engaged a clever and unscrupulous native lawyer for his defence, and the two insisted on witnesses from various remote parts being called. Days dragged into weeks, but at last, on a burning March morning, Cairns received news that the trial would begin in five days' time.

The summons found him in Ban Tern, for during the long delay he had been obliged to leave Iakon in order to supervise his forest work. He kissed his wife and daughter good-bye cheerfully, but Elise looked anxious.

"I'm afraid of Check Lee," she whispered. "If he gets off at the trial he will come back here and be our enemy for life. I wish he didn't live so near to us."

"Well, we can't turn back now," said her husband quietly. "Besides, what about the children he's starved and the natives he's ruined?"

"Dick, you're right. Go ahead and do your best to get him convicted."

But Check Lee was acquitted. He had money, and money was power. Ai Kharn, now eking out a miserable existence in a small tobacco plantation near Ban Tern, had been called for the defence. Bribed handsomely by Check Lee, he swore on oath that the elephant captured in the pit had certainly

not been Poo Lorn, and that never once during his service with Check Lee had he seen a sign of the great tusker.

The simple Laos from the village where the pit had been dug were twisted inside out by the Chinaman's lawyer. At the end of an hour's gruelling cross-examination they had contradicted themselves a dozen times. The atmosphere in the crowded court was stifling. Witnesses both for the defence and prosecution became mazed with the heat and the torrents of words. Only the white men who had seen Poo Lorn's brands through the field-glasses kept comparatively cool; but though their evidence could not be shaken, doubt was cast by the lawyer as to whether the brand had been that of Check Lee. There were dozens of different Chinese brands in existence, all of which looked very much alike. Could the great white lords who spoke for the prosecution read Chinese characters? They could not? Well, well! The lawyer spread eloquent hands and appealed to his lordship.

The Siamese judge, aware that the evidence was not sufficient to convict, was forced to pronounce the prisoner not guilty. Check Lee grinned evilly and left the court with no official stain upon his character, while the onlookers swore under their breath, for the man was hated throughout the length and breadth of the land.

Richard Cairns rode back to Ban Tern, worried and disappointed. Check Lee returned to his teak house in the village.

The weeks passed without event, for Check Lee was no fool. Whenever he met white people in the market-place he bowed courteously and inquired after their healths. He showed no signs of rancour, and gradually the fears of the others were allayed.

It was not till the end of May that Check Lee

struck. He sent secretly for Ai Kharn, who arrived at his house after dark had fallen.

"Ai Kharn," said he, "thou hast spent all the money I gave thee?"

"Great One, I have."

"That is bad, for doubtless a tobacco plantation yields much work and little profit."

"The lord speaks the truth," answered Ai Kharn.

"Now supposing Ai Kharn were promised the sum of one thousand ticals. What would he be prepared to do to earn that sum?"

One thousand ticals! The sum was a fortune. With it one could buy paddy-fields, pigs and buffaloes, and have fish-curry every night.

"Great One, I would do anything for such a sum."

Check Lee hissed with satisfaction. "Then that amount will be thine if thou wilt steal the lord Cairns's little daughter," he said quickly.

Ai Kharn gasped, and the Chinaman rapidly outlined his plan. During the hot weather the white man and his wife were in the habit of going for rides in the cool of the evening, leaving the child in the care of the Lao ayah, who had lately got into the habit of sauntering a short way up one of the jungle paths at the back of the company's premises. This she was forbidden to do; but the ayah, being young and pretty, had a lover.

Ai Kharn was doubtful. There would be much danger, he explained; moreover, what was he to do with the child?

"That is for Ai Kharn to decide," smiled Check Lee. "It could, for instance, be dropped in a lonely part of the forest. Ai Kharn could then make for the border and live in ease for the remainder of his days."

Ai Kharn went out into the night to consider the proposition.

The reward exceeded his wildest dreams, but were he to abandon the child he would be guilty of murder. The executioner's sword, bright and hissing, flashed through his mind. Ai Kharn proceeded to the grog-shop of the village and tossed down a dram of fiery palm spirit. After two or three gulps he thought how he could earn the reward and at the same time be guiltless of murder. In his numerous journeys through the forest he had once passed a queer village eighty miles due north of Ban Tern. Built right in the heart of the jungle, it was entirely cut off from the normal haunts of men. To this place he would take the child, secretly deposit it at dead of night near the headman's hut, and then carry on alone to the border. The parents might or might not trace the child, but the odds were that many moons would elapse first. Meanwhile the villagers would take care of it. They might leave it to die, of course, but that was their affair. Ai Kharn would not be directly responsible for its death.

Four days' journey, he reckoned, should bring him to the village. He would use no paths, but cut straight through the jungle. The hot weather would assist him in his escape, for the ground was now too hard for tell-tale footprints. For food a small bag of rice and some buffalo milk would suffice.

Ai Kharn went back to the Chinaman, resolved to mention nothing of his decision. He would promise unconditionally to carry out the other's wishes.

"Great One," said he, "I do what you ask, but I require two thousand ticals for the service."

"I give fifteen hundred."

"As the lord wills," said Ai Kharn meekly, sur-

prised at the ease with which he had clinched the bargain. "The Great One will give me the sum now?"

Check Lee frowned, but there was no other way. It would not do for the man to make a second visit to the house. Check Lee extracted from his safe fifteen hundred dirty one-tical notes, but the mahout regarded the mass of paper with dismay.

"Great One, I fear for all these notes," he said. "Rivers will have to be crossed, also the rains may break at any moment. The money may be valueless before ever I reach the border."

"Then will I give thee a large tin in which to place it."

"Lord, I cannot afford the extra weight. Also . . ." Ai Kharn paused, striving to gain time. The notes might be forgeries. He would never be able to return to Siam, and thus the Chinaman would have tricked him cleverly.

Check Lee read the other's thoughts, and smiled. The money was perfectly genuine, but Ai Kharn's objections were reasonable enough. Well, the notes must be exchanged for others of a higher value. But who could do this service?

Now Check Lee loved his little joke, and his natural vanity prompted him to play a grim jest on the white lord whom he hated. He knew that Richard Cairns liked to have a plentiful supply of small notes with which to pay his mahouts and coolies. He would send Sang Noo to the company office next morning to change them. Ai Kharn would be satisfied, and the white man would be producing the very money that was to pay for the kidnapping of his child. As for any suspicion falling on Check Lee, he would take good care to produce proof that Cairns's notes had been paid out to some person other than Ai Kharn.

"Ai Kharn," said Check Lee, "to-morrow night thou shalt have fifteen one-hundred-tical notes from the office of the great company itself. Thou art satisfied?"

"Great One, I am."

"Then go."

In the morning, to make doubly sure, Ai Kharn crept to the company compound and crouched behind the hedge till he saw the cringing Sang Noo, carrying the bundle of one-tical notes, disappear into the white man's office and reappear with a small envelope.

When dark fell he went to Check Lee, who handed him a tiny airtight tin which weighed next to nothing and would keep the precious money from damp. Ai Kharn slid it into his clothes and listened to some final instructions.

"Thou wilt be watched," the Chinaman warned him; "so see that thou dost not leave till the child is thine. And remember: once over the border, Siam is denied thee."

Ai Kharn bowed himself out. Late next afternoon he hid in the jungle behind the company's premises. When evening came he saw the ayah lead the child up the forest path. He sneaked through the trees and presently saw the ayah stop to look round for her lover, who had not yet appeared. The child ran to pluck a flower that grew on one side of the path.

Like a tiger Ai Kharn sprang. In a flash he had seized the child. Putting his free hand over her mouth to prevent her screaming, he darted back into cover unseen and unheard. After a few seconds there was a shriek as the ayah noted the absence of her charge; but without turning his head Ai Kharn raced through the rapidly increasing gloom.

CHAPTER XX

THE AGONY OF RICHARD AND ELISE

THE light was falling when Elise and her husband returned. They did not find their little daughter laughing and splashing in her bath, nor was her nurse in the bungalow. From some of the compound coolies they learned that less than an hour ago the ayah had been seen to take the child for a walk.

Accompanied by the coolies, they hastened in the direction indicated. They called, but no answer came save the mocking echo of their voices from the gloomy trees. The party beat through the jungle on each side of the path till dark had fallen, and then the coolies, fearful of tigers and devils, huddled into terrified groups and refused to go farther.

Cairns seized his wife's arm. "To the village," he said urgently. "Show me where the ayah lives."

Ten minutes later the pair arrived at the ramshackle hut where the girl had her home. They climbed up the ladder, brushed aside the rushes that guarded the entrance, and stepped into the light. The ayah was rocking from side to side on the split bamboo floor, tears streaming down her brown cheeks.

"The child?" said Cairns harshly.

The ayah babbled. A devil had taken the child . . . the devil leapt out of the jungle at her . . . it had possessed horns and molten breath. . . .

"And why didst thou not leave word at the compound?"

"Lord, I was very much afraid. I avoid the compound and run quickly home."

The white man wasted no time. He and Elise rushed to their bungalow, seized lanterns, and went once more up the forest path. For hour after hour they searched and listened for the reply that never came. At last, long past midnight, Elise collapsed. Richard picked her up and carried her to the bungalow. He laid her on the bed and forced brandy between her lips. She struggled upright.

"Dick. It's not true. Tell me it's not true." In the dim light of an oil-lamp suspended from the ceiling she looked white, fey, unearthly.

He did not reply, but pillowed her head on his shoulder. The silent hours passed, and at dawn they set out again with a large search-party. By eight o'clock in the morning Cairns was convinced that the child had been kidnapped. Nowhere could signs of blood be found. The possibility of some wild animal having taken her was therefore no longer to be considered. He must track down the man responsible for the terrible crime.

Cairns strode down to the village of Ban Tern, where he went from hut to hut making certain inquiries. His object was to discover whether any villager might be unaccountably missing from his home. In this he was aided greatly by the inhabitants, who all loved the little girl and her mother. They searched far and wide and brought news that Ai Kharn was absent from his hut in the tobacco plantation.

Cairns hastened to that hut. It bore signs of a hurried departure, and the truth flashed across his mind. Ai Kharn had given evidence on behalf of Check Lee during the recent trial; Ai Kharn had been summarily dismissed from the company's service and had scant cause to love him, Cairns.

Lastly, why had Check Lee changed that large amount of money two days previously?

Richard Cairns entered the house of the Chinaman. "My child has been lost," he said, and his face was white to the lips.

Check Lee was visibly distressed. The little flower lost or kidnapped? Impossible! He could not believe it. He would send men in an immediate search for the culprit.

Cairns seized the Chinaman's scrawny throat. His lean fingers were hard as steel bands and his eyes were merciless. "The truth, O Chinaman, or thou diest here and now," he hissed.

But Check Lee had courage. Not by the flicker of a muscle did he betray fear, and reluctantly Cairns loosened his grip. Check Lee passed a hand across his throat.

"The white lord is not quite himself," he said affably. "Check Lee forgets the discourtesy."

Cairns forced back his desire to kill the man.

"Where are those notes?" he asked.

"The notes? Yesterday I buy a farm and pay the owner with them."

"Check Lee is not accustomed to buy farms. He has most of them mortgaged already."

The Chinaman smiled. "Sometimes I make exceptions. See, here is the contract for the sale."

The speaker handed Cairns a sheet of paper he had taken from his safe. On it was a deed of sale, stamped, signed, sealed and witnessed. After glancing at it, Cairns abruptly left the house. Whether the deed was forged or not could be discovered later; meanwhile precious time was being wasted.

On his way to the bungalow Cairns thought rapidly. The mahout would aim for the nearest portion of the Indo-China border, which lay due east

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from Ban Tern. To the border, therefore, he too would go. But what should he do about Elise?

He told her of his discoveries, but she betrayed little emotion. Sheer will-power and courage were sustaining her.

"You must make for the border at once, then. And you must go without me."

"But I can't possibly leave you here alone. You must come."

"No, Dick, we can work better apart. I shall only keep you back, while if I stay in Ban Tern I can send coolies for the police at Lakon and keep on searching round the village in case Ai Kharn hasn't taken her after all. I can stand the loneliness so long as I know we are doing our best."

In the crisis both man and wife remained calm to an almost unhuman degree. Cairns collected volunteers from the village and a few of his fastest coolies, then set out for the border. With him also went the little dog he had rescued long ago from the deserted bungalow in the forest. Of late years it had been his constant companion, and now he decided that the animal might prove useful in tracking down the little girl with whom it had so often played.

While Elise organised search-parties round Ban Tern, Cairns pushed eastward. After four days' fearful toil he reached the border just as the rains were breaking. He made inquiries from several Annamite villages, but none of the inhabitants had seen anyone answering to the description of either Ai Kharn or the child. Having satisfied himself that the villagers were speaking the truth, there was nothing for it but to return the way he had come.

This he did, but, hoping against hope, he occasionally made wide sweeps on the slight chance

that Ai Kharn might be hiding till the search should wear itself out.

The path had been bad enough, but now the going was beyond description. The rains were by this time pouring heavily, making the ground moist and slippery. Sharp rocks stabbed through Cairns's soles. Under dark evergreen leaves poisonous snakes stirred, hissed, rustled coldly. Leeches flicked themselves up his puttees, wormed their thin slaty-black bodies through the lace-holes of his boots, fed on feet, shins and knees. Mosquitoes, sweat-bees, ticks, and a thousand other horrors clustered thick upon him. Thorns, creeper, vines, and stinging grass plucked and tore at face and clothing as he fought through the dim, unearthly light.

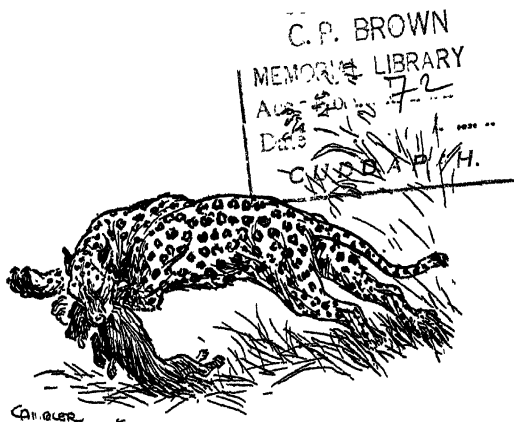
At night they camped wherever they found themselves. A small clearing would be made and in it the tents were pitched. But even at night little rest came to Cairns. His bedding was soaked, the ground sheet was alive with red ants, and leeches made their painless bites and gorged at leisure. In the morning their bloated, slug-like bodies lay black across the sheets, and the flames of a match ended them.

On the last night before Cairns gave up the search, a further horror was added. He had sunk into a troubled sleep, when a stifled yelp awoke him. He heard the rush of some heavy body leaving his tent, and he sprang through his mosquito-net. His electric torch showed that his little dog, which had been sleeping near the bed, had vanished.

Cairns ran out of the tent and shouted. The forest swallowed his voice. The trees dripped with rain, and a night-bird called. He pointed the torch ahead, to left, to right. Branches, living with creeper, menaced him everywhere. Huge red and

yellow toadstools leered and sent breaths of fetid air through the humid atmosphere. A bat swooped, fluttered, passed. The rain grew heavier and the earth and jungle steamed, pattered and hissed.

Cairns walked into his tent. He lit a hurricane lantern, pulled on his mosquito-boots, drew a sodden blanket round his shoulders, and sat huddled in his camp-chair. The dog was gone, taken by the panther that must have been watching the clearing ever since camp had been made that night.



Here in this savage land the law of the strong prevailed without justice or mercy. His child had been taken away from him, then his dog. By the time he reached Ban Tern he might find that his wife had been murdered by the Chinaman.

Richard Cairns hurled the blanket off him and

stood upright. For days he had scarcely touched food, facing hardships that would have killed most men. Now malaria had him in its relentless grip, and though his limbs were still strong the fever was spinning in his brain. He took his revolver out of its holster and bent over the table. Holding the weapon under the light of the lantern, he cleaned it with exacting care, and when dawn paled over the gloomy trees every speck of rust had vanished from the barrel. He loaded each chamber, slipped the weapon back into the holster, and barked sharp orders to the coolies. They obeyed with alacrity, for at last the white lord had decided to return to the comfort and safety of Ban Tern.

On the following afternoon Richard Cairns strode over his compound on the way to the village. His fevered brain told him that his wife was dead, and there was no need to visit the bungalow as yet. A certain teak house beckoned, where he would riddle the black-hearted Chinaman with bullets.

Half-way across the compound a form appeared between him and his goal. He brushed it aside, but it clung to him. As if against his will he found himself listening to words, words that implored him to come to a warm bed, eat warm food, rest.

His own will bent to that other force, and he saw Elise standing in front of him. Sanity came back to his brain, but with it his strength left him abruptly.

"Elise, I've failed you, failed you in every way I could," he cried hoarsely.

Then merciful oblivion swept over the stricken man.

The illness of Richard Cairns proved the salvation of his wife. During his absence Elise had

come near to a mental breakdown, but now the need of nursing her husband occupied all her attention. She watched him by day and by night; and when she snatched a few hours' rest, queer dreams haunted her sleep. She saw her child alive and well, but in surroundings as dim and fantastic as the dreams themselves. The visions comforted her, and she began to accept them as facts. Some day her darling would be playing again in the compound; her loss was a nightmare that would fade.

After a week's high fever Richard had passed the crisis. Pale and weak he lay on the bed, but his pulse was normal and he was master of himself once more.

"No news?" he whispered.

Elise shook her head, but hope shone in her eyes.

"She's alive. I just know she is. When you were ill I seemed to see her. Somewhere in the jungle. . . ."

Elise pressed her forehead, striving to regain those elusive dreams.

Richard looked at her sadly. Her faith distressed him, for little Elise had gone beyond recall. A thought flashed through his mind.

"What have you told your mother?" he asked.

"Nothing. I had a letter from her last week."

She showed him the letter. It stated that the Morrisons, after five years in England, were yearning for the East again. They would leave England, so wrote her mother, in October. Thus they would escape the winter and arrive in Siam when the rains were over. They hoped to spend Christmas in Ban Tern with their little granddaughter, whom they were longing to see.

"What can I tell them?"

"You must tell them the truth."

"That Elise is alive?"

The words stabbed Richard to the quick, and a great fear chilled his heart.

"Darling," he said, "we won't let your people come out to us. I'll take you home to them."

"I won't go. How could I, with our child still out here?"

Richard checked a rising lump in his throat. The only course for them was to leave the jungle immediately. Once with her parents in England, Elise would gradually recover from the shock; but to remain in the bungalow, hoping against hope, spelt worse than death.

All his pleadings were, however, in vain, for Elise was resolved to stay in Ban Tern. Richard saw that only one course remained. He must at once tell the Morrisons of the tragedy, and ask them to leave England earlier than they had planned. They would soon persuade their daughter to come home with them. He could then await a successor and join them later. But, naturally, Elise must hear only part of the proposal.

"Well, we must telegraph to your people and ask them to come out to us as soon as they can."

"No, I won't hear of a telegram being sent. How can one explain anything in a telegram? Besides, I don't want to have Mother and Daddy out here just yet. They will try to sympathise, and I don't want sympathy. There isn't any need for it. Let them come out if they wish, but not before the cold weather begins. A march in the rains from Lakon might kill them."

Richard bit his lip, for he knew that Elise's real reason was to delay her parents' arrival until the child should be found again. Then he reached for pen and paper, and wrote the most difficult letter of his life. This he handed to a trusted coolie, and

made sure that he left for the head of the railway without Elise seeing.

When the man had gone, Richard prayed for strength. In the weeks that must elapse before the Morrisons could complete their eight-thousand-mile journey, he must bring all his will-power to help Elise to stand seeing her hopes unfulfilled.

CHAPTER XXI

LOST IN THE FOREST

AI KHARN swept forward with the struggling child. A hundred yards from the spot where he had trapped her, he permitted her to breathe freely. She screamed and cried, but the mahout took no heed. He pushed on, anxious to put as many miles as possible between him and Ban Tern.

Soon the forest became pitch dark, but Ai Kharn went steadily ahead. His eyes were capable of extraordinary dilation, so that by night he could see almost as well as an animal; and, guided by the native's sure sense of direction, he headed due north for mile upon mile.

At midnight, careless of tiger or snakes, he slept, the weary child lolling beside him. At dawn Elise's crying woke him. She wore round her throat a tiny gold necklace, and this Ai Kharn slipped off, explaining that for safety's sake he would keep it in his tin. He then set himself to be as pleasant to her as possible, for he realised that his task would be extremely difficult should Elise give trouble. He washed her at a neighbouring pool and fed her with rice and buffalo milk. In spite of her misery Elise

ate hungrily, and when she had finished he spoke to her in Lao. He told her that the ayah was a wicked woman from whom he had rescued her. He said also that her mother was at present in a far-away village, and that he had been ordered to take her there. In three days' time—two if she were good—she would be safely with her mother again.

Little Elise gazed at him wide-eyed as she heard the words. She wanted to believe him, for no child of that age understands lying; nevertheless there was an expression in Ai Kharn's villainous features that she feared by instinct. Torn between terror and belief, she remained quiet for the rest of the day, thus enabling Ai Kharn to make good progress.

Two mornings later he came to a thick part of evergreen jungle that made travelling more difficult. This, he knew, was part of the range where Poo Lorn had grazed during the first years of his freedom; but now, Ai Kharn thought with relief, the elephant was probably hundreds of miles away. He therefore pushed on fearlessly, and after half an hour's scrambling he reached the limit of the evergreen. Clear forest glades now stretched before him, and he heaved a sigh of thankfulness.

Lowering the child to the ground, he rubbed his aching arms and took a deep breath of the fresher air. Having rested, he was about to pick her up when he froze to a motionless statue. Something was advancing towards him through a leafy bamboo screen ahead. His heart galloped with fear as, scarcely daring to breathe, he waited for the unknown to appear.

The bamboos crackled, then a huge elephant strode into view. It needed no second glance to tell Ai Kharn that Poo Lorn the Terrible was gazing at him with red baleful eyes that reflected the unquenched hatred of years.

Since Poo Lorn's escape from Check Lee the elephant had been a nightmare to Ai Kharn. Often in his sleep he had dreamed that the giant creature was chasing him. He even felt the curved tusks tearing and ripping at his flesh, taking frightful vengeance. But Fate had helped the mahout, for in the years of the Terror Poo Lorn had never been within miles of Ban Tern; yet, at the very moment of Ai Kharn's triumph, he now loomed huge, relentless, awe-inspiring to the last degree.

Ai Kharn shook off the icy hands of fear. Ignoring the child, he bolted for a hundred yards, then climbed a suitable tree with lightning rapidity. Without undue haste Poo Lorn followed him, and came to rest at the foot of the refuge. Ten, twenty, thirty minutes passed. The mahout's features had turned to an ashen pallor. Poo Lorn could remain by the tree for days should he so wish.

But a gleam of hope soon showed, for Poo Lorn, as if tired of waiting, moved a few paces towards a bunch of thick grass, where he began to graze. Ai Kharn slid down the tree and fled. Poo Lorn bellowed and was after him again. Though his vengeance on mankind as a whole was at an end, the elephant had instantly recognised his old enemy. Yet he did not hurry, for the mahout was far away from the haunts of humans, and thus absolutely at his mercy.

Ai Kharn turned, twisted, ducked and doubled. But in vain; he could not shake off his pursuer. In a final desperate effort he plunged into the thick evergreen through which he had passed that morning. This proved his undoing, for the dense mass of thorns and creeper impeded his progress, and the sounds of the elephant drew rapidly nearer.

Poo Lorn clove his great bulk through the evergreen. Bushes and thorns fell away from him. A

lean body was flung ten feet into the air, to fall spread-eagled on the ground. Poo Lorn knelt. Life ended for Ai Kharn in a choking scream.

Poo Lorn grunted and, leaving the trampled man, moved slowly back the way he had come. He tore down branches, with one clean sweep ripped off the leaves, then chewed at leisure. Presently a strange wailing sound echoed through the woods, but he took no notice of it. He fed till he reached clearer forest, whereupon a human scent was wafted to him down the wind. The humans were, however, his friends the jungle people, and he therefore suffered them to approach him. They had been pleased at his return after so long an absence, and they now salaamed in reverence and timidly placed a large papaya at his feet. He ripped open the fruit and ate it, and the jungle-people bowed their heads and withdrew.

Soon they also heard a strange sound in the forest. Curious, they investigated, and to their astonishment they beheld a small white child. The jungle-people conversed in guttural monosyllables, endeavouring to explain this to themselves. They knew there existed brown men and brown women who lived in large shanties on the banks of rivers, but of white people they knew nothing. They pointed and chattered, making queer animal sounds in their amazement. Then one of the women in the tribe advanced boldly towards Elise and picked her up, for she saw that, whatever her colour, the child was lost; lonely and terror-stricken. Elise screamed and fought, but the woman tried to comfort her.

The jungle-people decided to return to their huts, but on the way a remarkable sign was vouchsafed

them. Poo Lorn chanced to walk across their path, and little Elise kicked herself free and ran to him.

For the whole of her little life the child had been accustomed to elephants. She had ridden the company's baggage animals, and many were the evenings when she had fed the gentlest of them with bun and tamarind. As her parents had never allowed her to approach the more unmanageable tuskers, Elise had no idea that elephants could be savage. To her they were gentle creatures, with whom she loved to play. And now, amidst the terrifying newness of her surroundings, she at last saw a familiar object. Here after all these days was a creature she knew, who would certainly carry her back to her mother.

Poo Lorn gazed in wonder at this little creature, he felt her with his trunk, and she tried to catch it in her tiny hands. At the touch old emotions surged up in him. His little friend had come to him again.

The jungle-people looked on astounded. Perhaps their lord had brought the child to the forest, since they evidently knew one another. Moreover, why was the god swaying his bulk from side to side? It must be his wish that they take the child to their dwellings, else why had he carried her so close to their settlement?

The woman picked up Elise, but Poo Lorn showed no sign of remonstrance. The jungle-people and Elise were the only humans who had ever shown kindness to him. He rumbled deeply and followed the party as they moved in Indian file towards their colony.

The jungle-people arrived at some crazy-looking leaf erections, into the largest of which they carried the child. Elise had entered her new home.

CHAPTER XXII

JUNGLE NIGHTS AND JUNGLE DAYS

DURING the first week of her stay in the colony, little Elise nearly died. She cried constantly for her mother and refused to be comforted. But the jungle-people, mindful of their duty to the great elephant, tended her carefully. The rains had broken and mosquitoes abounded. They smeared her body with bark-juice to protect her from stings; they fed her with jungle-fowl eggs, fruit and wild honey, and gave her crude bamboo toys cut in the shape of pig and deer. Gradually the child's grief was replaced by interest in her new surroundings. She ceased her crying, ate hungrily, and soon was able to accompany the women and children in their quest for food.

She experienced countless marvels, for the jungle-people were part of the jungle itself. They had lived in it for generations and knew every one of its secrets.

On the first day they came to a small round hole in the earth. It meant nothing to Elise, but the jungle-women jabbered excitedly. With the aid of knife-edged stones they hacked down some bamboo-stems, cut them into two-foot lengths and joined them cunningly at slight angles to one another. This done, they placed one end of the improvised stove-pipe into the hole, and at the other end heaped a mound of damp leaves. By rubbing dry sticks together they produced a spark, and soon the leaves were smouldering. After half an hour's waiting they removed the smoking bamboo pipe from the

earth. One of the women then put one arm far down into the hole. A second later, amidst excited exclamations from the onlookers, she pulled out a suffocated animal. With shouts of triumph they carried their prize, an enormous bamboo-rat, back to the huts to be cooked and eaten.

Elise found that other kinds of food lived in holes. Crickets, for instance, were dug out, strung together on long thin sticks, and roasted over the fire. Black hairy spiders, the size of one's hand, were also routed out from their burrows. Their brittle fangs, a good half-inch in length, were broken off by the women's quick fingers, whereupon the tarantulas were killed by heat and their bodies hung over the entrances to the huts as charms against evil spirits.

While the women and children kept close to the huts, the men, armed with bows and arrows, went farther afield in their search for pig and deer. Occasionally they encountered very different kinds of prey. One morning they found a python curled round her nest of eggs. Since they hated all snakes, by instinct, they resolved to destroy both her and the nest. All other species of snakes left their eggs to be hatched out by the warmth of the sun, but they knew that the python, the one exception to the rule, would remain at her post and fight to the last in defence of her young. The jungle-people were also happily unaware of the legend that a python can only exert a stranglehold if its tail is first twisted round some immovable object: they knew that a python defends itself by opening its jaws and lunging with its head. Though the fangs are not poisonous, the head strikes like a cannon-ball, stunning the victim if not killing him outright. A quick crawl, a tightening of the steely folds, and every bone of the victim is broken and ready for the gorge.

The jungle-people therefore kept at a wary distance from the nest. They collected boulders and with much grunting placed them in the forks of a tree close by, then rained them down till python and nest were crushed out of existence. Then they returned to the colony and told the women of their prowess.

Though Elise encountered none of these dangers, she soon learnt the lesser perils of the jungle. She was taught to avoid the poisonous prickly bean that if touched sets up unbearable irritation; she learnt never to play with rotten fallen boughs, for in them lurk tiny yellow scorpions; she learnt that even the smallest creature might deal sharp stinging pain.

Yet there were many harmless living things of sheer beauty that brought happiness to her little soul. Queer insects, some like balls of cotton-wool, some like brown wrinkled leaves, at times moved slowly across the floor of the hut, while outside the air was alive with colour. Great gaudy butterflies, their wings measuring nine inches from tip to tip, flitted through the sunshine when the monsoon clouds broke for a brief period. Golden pheasants, jays, green parakeets, flickered and screamed, and in a tree directly overhead a giant hornbill lived. His nest was inside the tree-trunk, and he had walled in his mate lest she should neglect her eggs. He had left a small hole through which he could feed her, and all day long he would sail through the air with food for his family. Elise loved his harsh "Kok-kok-kok" as he whirred along on huge flapping wings, and she loved his absurd beak and ungainly appearance. How that hornbill made her laugh!

On the ground, too, was plenty of interest. She liked the delicate green sensitive-plant which, when

touched, would shrink as if frightened. Then there were the queer animals that came hurrying past. Mouse-deer no bigger than a hare, with perfect miniature bodies, occasionally dashed by. The old porcupine, fussing and rattling his quills, proclaimed his perpetual hurry. Lizards scuttled like flashes of light over the grass. Once she tried to catch one, but it left its tail behind in her hand. Elise caught no more lizards.

With the sounds of the jungle, too, she soon became familiar. She knew and could imitate the soft whoo of the hairy gibbons that capered amongst the branches high against the cloudy sky. The bell of the sambhur, the hoarse cry of the barking-deer, the plaintive bleat of the great horned buffalo—all these she would try to copy; but the noises of the night she made no effort to imitate. She huddled up then against her foster-mother and listened in awe to the voices of the darkened wilderness. The moan of the tiger, the short ragged cough of the panther, the long-drawn-out wail of the wild dog baying the moon, and the howling of the jackals, sent chills of fear through her and her companions.

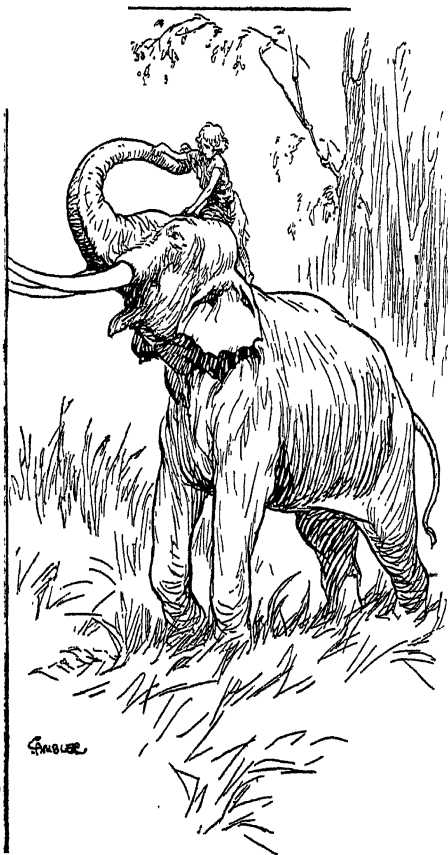
The sound she loved most was the deep rumble that heralded Poo Lorn's approach, for it was then only that she was permitted to venture far from the jungle-people. Running out to meet him, she would prod and pound him with the baby hands that had sunk right into his heart.

Both the child and the beast were lonely, though from different reasons. Elise was lonely because she was absent from her parents and her home: Poo Lorn because for years he had had hate as his sole companion. But now a new force had entered into his life. He was aware of strange pleasurable sensations whenever he met Elise, and he there-

fore grew into the habit of visiting her nearly every other day. Elise, copying the tricks of her father's mahouts, became bold enough to give him shrill orders to kneel and lift her in his trunk. Poo Lorn recognised the commands immediately and obeyed them. Sometimes he would raise her to his forehead and allow her to scramble on to his neck. They would then go for long saunters down the silent forest glades. He seemed to know that he held a precious life upon his head, for he never forgot to tear out of his way any overhanging branches that might harm the child.

As for Elise, secure and happy on her lofty perch, those journeys thrilled her more than any previous experience, for the strangest of sights were unfolded to her, and many a jungle drama did she see. Deer, with packs of yellow bushy-tailed wild dogs in pursuit, would blunder past them, and once she noticed a great antlered sambhur at bay in a pool, knee-deep in the water with head held low to ward off attack. Round the fringes of the pool the dogs squatted on their haunches, waiting with lolling tongues and heaving flanks for their prey to take to flight. Elise did not see the end of it, for Poo Lorn moved steadily ahead and the jungle swallowed both hunters and hunted.

It was at one of these pools that Elise herself had a narrow escape from destruction. Poo Lorn had knelt to bathe, and Elise, sliding off him, splashed and kicked in the warm shallow water. Presently some huge plate-like water lilies on the farther side of the pool attracted her attention and she ran to examine them. She was bending over them when fear gripped her. Some danger threatened behind her, though she could not tell what. She endeavoured to scream and run back to Poo Lorn, but her voice and legs failed her and she



Sometimes he would allow her to scramble on to his neck.

stood rooted to the spot. Luckily Poo Lorn's scent was unerring. He smelt the hidden death, and tore trumpeting past the child. The tiger that had been stalking its prey snarled hideously and gave way to the king of the jungle.

Poo Lorn, however, did fear some creatures, as Elise found out one day. On one of her rides, suddenly, a nightmare snake rose from the undergrowth and hissed. It was slaty-black with whity-yellow crescents along its spine, and a hood close to its evil head. Poo Lorn fled, and it was only by a miracle that Elise was not swept off and killed. The king-cobra, or hamadryad, does not, like other snakes, wait to be attacked. It comes without warning, black, swift, terrible; and Poo Lorn knew that against its deadly fangs even his mighty strength would be of no avail.

Being only a child, Elise sometimes grew angry with Poo Lorn. Seizing a stick, she would beat him with the whole of her strength. Poo Lorn loved it, for he liked being scratched. Then, weeping bitterly because she imagined that she had hurt her greatest friend, Elise would feed him with papaya and bananas, and generally make a fuss of him till the waning light warned her that it was time to ride back to the huts.

When Elise had been two months with the jungle-people the rains cleared temporarily. For a week the sun shone out of a cloudless sky, and the jungle-people decided to shift to another part of the forest in search of new and undisturbed game. This was simple, for, beyond their weapons and the smaller children, they had nothing to carry. They abandoned their old huts, and after a ten-mile walk through the jungle arrived at the

banks of a river, forded it at a shallow spot, and made a new colony beneath some frowning hills.

Though the vegetation was wet and gloomy, they seemed to experience no difficulty in obtaining dry grass and leaves. The new huts were of huge interlaced leaves supported on thin bamboo stems. On the ground they placed grass, which formed both floor and bedding. Round the outside of the huts they scooped with their hands deep channels to keep them from being flooded. The whole work took only one day to complete, and by evening they were safe and snug in their new settlement.

On the following morning the rains broke again. For hour after hour water poured down, and when darkness fell thunder rolled threateningly. The rain now doubled in intensity and resembled one vast cloudburst. A roaring wind surged through the forest, setting the tree fronds lashing to and fro. The thunder, booming and crackling round the sky, rolled in continuous salvoes, while the river rose from a lulling murmur to a full-throated roar.

Crouching in their draughty huts, the jungle-folk shivered. Presently, above the thrum of the river, they heard crashings and rumblings which made them huddle together in abject fright.

The violence of the storm increased, and when it reached its height the watchers heard the trumpet of an elephant. They waited, awe-struck, till a sheet of lightning illuminated Poo Lorn looming up before them. His great body was shiny black from the water, and he was evidently uneasy, for his trunk was threshing and his forefeet kicked at the damp earth.

A sign had been given the jungle-people. Poo Lorn had come to warn them of danger. Comforted by his presence, they snatched up the children and

rushed out of the huts. The lightning flamed and danced. Behind them rocks and boulders were tumbling down the hills. On each side of them mountain torrents were descending with terrific force. Ahead of them lay the river they had crossed two mornings ago. Then it had been easy to ford, but now it was deep and swirling. Being poor swimmers, they were cut off on all sides.

Poo Lorn lurched and made for the river-bank. As he stood there, illuminated by lightning, the jungle-people saw their one chance of survival. With frantic hands they tore down strands of creeper from the trees. Doubtless their god would suffer himself to be bound for the sole purpose of saving the lives of his servants. They twisted the strong thick creeper round his neck and sides, and he remained quite quiet, for these people and the child were his friends. He knelt, and the children were strapped on to his back. The men and women then grasped the loose ends of the creeper and Poo Lorn plunged into the torrent. Even as he did so, a rumbling avalanche swept down the hills.

Though one or two of the elder people were swept away, the majority of the tribe, soaked, buffeted, half-blinded by spray, hung on to their tow as the fury of the night swept round them. The river was a torrent, boiling, bubbling, hissing with rain, flaming into white ribbons of lightning, then wallowing in pitch darkness; but through it all Poo Lorn fought with his gigantic strength. He emerged, dripping, on the opposite bank. The jungle-people fell away from him. They tore the creeper from off his sides, salaamed to him in wonder and reverence. Poo Lorn flapped his ears and nosed for little Elise. Finding her safe, he vanished into the night.

The jungle-people never tried to recross that river. They built huts barely four miles from the site of their old colony and settled down to their normal routine of hunting, sleeping and eating. Three weeks after the landslide had occurred, however, a fresh trial was sent to them. Poo Lorn had disappeared.

Actually, he had left on one of those long secret journeys to the north, but neither the jungle-people nor Elise knew this. When more than a week had passed without a sign of him, loud lamentations rose from the huts. The jungle-people had lost their god, and Elise her friend. Wherefore she wept far into the night and refused to be comforted by her foster-mother.

PART IV

CHAPTER XXIII

CHECK LEE PLANS ESCAPE

NEARLY four months had passed since the disappearance of little Elise. September had come, and Richard Cairns watched the calendar with anxious eyes. In less than a fortnight's time the Morrisons were due to arrive in Bangkok, and a week later they would have completed their long journey to Ban Tern.

Cairns was thankful, for their arrival would save his wife. As week after week had gone by without news, her bright faith had dimmed. She performed her household duties mechanically, as if her mind were miles away in the depths of the gloomy jungle. In vain had her husband implored her to stay either in Lakon Lampang or Bangkok until the arrival of the Morrisons, for she would at least meet a few white women who could take care of her; but Elise had been adamant in her resolve to remain in Ban Tern.

During this period of anxious waiting Richard had been goodness itself. He nursed her when she was ill, comforted her during her periods of acute depression, and it was through him alone that she was able to face life bereft of hope.

The only occasions on which Cairns left Elise for more than a few hours happened when he sought out the farmer who was alleged to have sold the paddy-fields to Check Lee. But the man, probably bribed by the Chinaman, had sworn that the deed of sale was genuine; when asked to produce

the notes in proof, he stated that he had exchanged them with a Burmese who had now left the country. Cairns, though he knew the farmer to be lying, returned to the compound and wrote letters to various officials and lawyers in the capital. Their replies, however, merely confirmed his own suspicions: no proof existed which would warrant the arrest of the Chinaman a second time.

While Elise was taking the afternoon rest upon which he insisted, Richard gazed across the compound. Presently, as he rose to cross over to the office, a strange native came running towards the bungalow, and Cairns halted in his stride. The new-comer appeared to be a forest hunter, for he carried an ancient blunderbuss and his skin was dark with sun. He ran up the steps and salaamed before Cairns.

"Lord," said he, "I have news to tell you."

Cairns's heart bounded, but with an effort he remained outwardly calm.

"Speak, O hunter."

The man told his story. He had been out in the forest for buck, and had slept alone for many nights. Three days ago, he passed a colony of jungle-people. Lest they should take it into their heads to attack him, he had hidden till nightfall. In the evening he had seen a strange child. Its body was brown, but different. Moreover, its hair was flaxen and its eyes were blue. At the time he had thought nothing of the matter, but on passing through Ban Tern to-day he had mentioned the incident to a dealer in animal skins, and the dealer had said that he must go at once to the great white lord who lived upon the hill.

"If thou canst lead me to the place where the child was seen," said Cairns when the man paused for breath, "one thousand ticals shall be thine."

The hunter gasped. But the white lord was in earnest, and the compound sprang into activity. The fastest elephants were brought in, and by three o'clock in the afternoon Richard and Elise, mounted on ponies, were heading through the jungle in a northerly direction. By dint of forced marching they reached the outskirts of the colony in forty-eight hours, and then Cairns spread out his coolies and cautiously approached the crazy huts.

The jungle-people, awed by the elephants and the size of the men confronting them, made no attempt at resistance. They cowered on their hams and watched every movement of the new-comers. They saw two strange white human beings lift up the little girl who had come to them out of the void. They saw the little girl look terrified, then cry with gladness and put her arms around the woman. The mother, for mother she must be, wept bitterly and clasped the infant to her bosom. This was queer, thought the jungle-people, for should not a mother be happy to regain her long-lost child?

But more extraordinary things were to happen to these simple folk. Instead of the white man being angry with them for keeping the child, he showered upon them all manner of eatables, the like of which they had never seen before. This done, he and his companions disappeared, leaving the jungle-people extremely bewildered. Recovering from their surprise, they jabbered and gesticulated till a great fear-struck them dumb. What would they tell their god, should he return and seek for the child?

The jungle-people had seemed quite harmless, so Cairns set up his tents within a few miles of the colony, for he wished to camp early and give Elise a rest. Once the tents were up, little Elise was bathed, and Cairns felt a lump rise in his throat as

he watched mother and child together. Leaving them alone for the moment, he stole softly out of the tent and gazed at a universe that had suddenly become most wonderfully beautiful.

His cook approached him. "Lord," said that worthy, wearing a broad grin all over his dusky features, "there is naught for dinner to-night save bread and rice. Did not the master give all his chickens to the wild people?"

Cairns smiled back at the cook. He was far too happy to be hungry, but he realised that he must get in supplies of some sort to provide for the rest of the journey to Ban Tern. He therefore seized his gun and walked through the forest in search of possible game.

The rains being on the wane, the evening was clear and sunny; but Cairns, engrossed in his thoughts, missed several opportunities of bagging some fat green pigeon. At last the crowing of a jungle-cock aroused him to realities and he hastened in the direction of its cry.

He passed the deserted huts of the wild folks' old colony, and a few hundred yards farther on arrived at a thick patch of evergreen, inside which he heard the bird calling. Guided by the sound, he plunged through the dense mass of thorns and creeper; but the jungle-cock, keeping well out of sight, scuttled away ahead of him. Soon the failing light warned him that it was time to abandon the chase and return to camp. He was about to swing on his heel when a white glimmer on the ground attracted his attention. He bent, then drew in his breath sharply, for he was looking down at the skeleton of a man.

How long he had been dead he did not know, for in the tropics the ants work quickly. But from the remains of the clothing that hung in shreds

from the bones he realised that no jungle-man had crawled here to die. Then how, he asked himself, had a villager come to meet his end in such a lonely spot as this?

His curiosity thoroughly aroused, Cairns scanned the surrounding earth. A suspicion had flashed across his mind, and he strove to find some clue as to the identity of the dead man. He found it near the remains—a small tin which rattled when he picked it up. He took off the lid. Inside the tin he saw Elise's gold necklace, also fifteen one-hundred tical notes in a state of perfect preservation.

Cairns slipped the tin into his shirt and retraced his steps to camp, bagging on his way two brace of green pigeon.

"Dick," said Elise, as he walked into the tent, "she's remembering her Lao again, and she keeps on talking about some elephant. She says it's a friend of hers. What can she mean?"

"Goodness knows," replied her husband absently, for his thoughts were not with elephants.

"Did you find anything?"

"Only a few pigeon." Cairns wished to keep his other discovery a secret for the present.

By the time the party reached Ban Tern, Cairns had weighed the pros and cons of the case, and he felt sure that at long last the arms of the law would clutch Check Lee, the Chinaman. Banks in Northern Siam being non-existent, it was the custom for all Cairns's company money to come up by rail from Bangkok under the charge of a trusted clerk. At the head of the railway Cairns received the money and carried it out by elephant to Ban Tern, where he placed it in the safe of his office. In order to minimise the chances of robbery, he kept a small book in which he invariably jotted down the numbers of the notes, together with marginal state-

ments as to how he disposed of them. Thus, should ever a robbery occur, he could report the numbers to the police.

Cairns now hurried to his office and compared the numbers of the notes he had found in the tin with those in his book. As he had expected, the notes were the ones he had handed Sang Noo. Proof, real proof at last! In his new case against Check Lee there would be no frightened witnesses to be tongue-tied by a clever native lawyer. Hard facts would take their place. Certain notes had been given to Check Lee. These had been found on the body of a man, who had possessed himself of Elise's gold necklace. The child had been discovered in the neighbourhood of the corpse. Therefore the man, who was undoubtedly Ai Kharn, had been her kidnapper, and he had been in the pay of Check Lee for this very purpose. How else account for such a huge sum upon him?

But then, reasoned Cairns, Check Lee might escape on some point of law, and his family would again be exposed to terrible danger. Yet the Chinaman was a ghoul in human form, and it was his duty to have him arrested. Perhaps he would take action after Elise had been sent on holiday with her parents, though by that time Check Lee might have fled for the border.

Torn between conflicting emotions, Richard considered the problem all day. At dusk Sang Noo, the Chinaman's secretary, came shuffling across the compound.

"My master has heard," said Sang Noo in an ingratiating drawl, "that the little flower has been found. My master is pleased and sends the white lord his congratulations."

"Tell thy master that I am pleased to hear these words," replied Cairns dryly.

The secretary bowed. "And where, lord, if I might ask, was the child found?"

"With the jungle-people, some sixty miles from here," answered the other, for he realised that the news would have been spread by the coolies all over the village.

"The lord did not find how she got there?"

"He did not."

"And what will the lord do now?"

Cairns grinned inwardly. Sang Noo had been sent by his master to discover how much Cairns now knew of the affair. Well, the secretary would get scant information out of him.

"What will he do?" Cairns shrugged his shoulders. "What more is to be done, since the child is mine again?"

Sang Noo snuffled, apologised, coughed discreetly, and crept back to his master.

"Great One," said he, "the lord Cairns will say naught beyond what we ourselves have heard in the market-place. But I think he looks pleased. He looks, indeed, as if he were aware of something that bodes us no good."

"Huh!" breathed Check Lee, and thought long and hard. The odds were that Ai Kharn had dropped the child in some remote part of the forest, where it had been found and cared for by the jungle-people. Yet this was only guesswork, and the very fact that the white man was behaving in so easy a manner made him anxious. Soon Check Lee's uneasy conscience began to torment him. These white lords—luck seemed to aid them in every undertaking he took against them. It was written that they should win and he should fail.

Check Lee's iron nerve was failing him at last. Perhaps he saw the stern hand of justice seizing him and casting him into prison for the rest of his

life; but, whatever the cause, the Chinaman now felt urged to do what was for him a strange thing.

When the village was fast asleep he entered a tiny room at the back of his house. There, in a niche in the wall, he lit tapers. Incense burned. Night cloaked the land, and silence was in the house. Check Lee was alone with his sacred ancestors.

For years he had neglected them. He had been too much occupied with the business of making money to give much thought to the holy and reverend dead. But now he would make amends. Taking all his money with him, he would leave Ban Tern for ever. He would make for the border and lead a new and righteous existence in China.

On the morrow he called for Sang Noo.

"O scribe, to-day there is much to be done, since to-night we leave for the border."

"As the Great One wills. We go to the French country?"

"And through it to my own country."

Sang Noo croaked. He had never journeyed so far as this. French Indo-China he knew well, but China itself—it was a long way off.

"Save for Ah Fong, the cook, we go alone," went on Check Lee. "See, therefore, that three ponies are bought secretly, so that none may know of our departure."

"Great One, could not the horses be hired?" asked the economical secretary.

"They could not, for we leave Ban Tern for ever."

Sang Noo's face became a picture of dismay. The vision did not appeal. The rains were still falling and he was to go hundreds of miles through virgin forest to an unknown country. Never again would he see the cheerful market place of Ban Tern, never again haggle with an old Lao woman over

the price of a rice-cake dainty; never again behold the placid River Mae Lang.

Sang Noo glanced at his master's face, and for the first time saw traces of weakness in it. Check Lee's star was on the wane. At the thought he plucked up courage.

"Great One," he said sulkily, "this is too much that you ask. I go not on this venture."

But however much Check Lee might fear the white man, of the cringing scribe he had no fear whatever. He stretched out a skinny claw and seized the secretary's arm in a vicelike grip.

"Knave, thou goest with me," he hissed.

Sang Noo writhed with pain. "Great One, I go," he gasped.

"See to the horses," snapped Check Lee.

Sang Noo bowed meekly and wormed out of the house. When he had gone, the other clapped, and Ah Fong slip-slopped in from the little kitchen.

"Ah Fong, thou art my friend?"

Ah Fong grunted. He rarely did more.

Check Lee hissed, for he had seen certain information on Sang Noo's cowardly features.

"To-day leave thy cooking, Ah Fong, and shadow Sang Noo."

Ah Fong grunted again and with expressionless face slithered out of the house.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE STRANGE BEHAVIOUR OF SANG NOO

SANG Noo bought the horses, and, after bribing the seller to secrecy and telling him to have them saddled and bridled in readiness for the night, returned to the Chinaman's house. There he helped his master in sundry preparations, and at noon an unappetising meal was served by Ah Fong. This over, Check Lee sank into profound slumber in his chair. In the kitchen the snores of Ah Fong told Sang Noo that the cook was also resting before the journey. Sang Noo smirked with satisfaction and glided out of the house.

Sang Noo had steeled himself to a great resolve, but first, in order to be braced for the coming ordeal, he went to the local grog-shop and tossed down a dram of toddy. He had finished with Check Lee. Was he, for the sake of serving an ungrateful bullying master, to quit the homely scenes of the village he had known for so long? He would do no such thing. He would go forthwith to the great white lord and tell the whole truth about the Chinaman's evil-doing. The white lord would give him a large reward for the information and clap Check Lee in irons. Thus would his master meet with the end he deserved, while he himself would be free to enjoy his beloved Ban Tern.

Yet in his heart of hearts he still feared Check Lee, and accordingly he did not take the direct route up the hill to the white man's premises, but cut through the jungle in order to approach them from the rear.

Once in the scrub that bordered the compound,

however, Sang Noo's courage failed him completely. How could he betray his master without revealing to the white lord that he had been his accomplice? And what would the lord Cairns do when he heard that Sang Noo knew all about the kidnapping? The lord would be exceedingly angry, and the only reward he would get for the information would be a good beating and several years in jail.

Shivering, he cowered in the jungle for the better part of an hour. Then, conscious that he had made a thorough fool of himself, he walked slowly back to the village. Being reluctant to return to Check Lee's house, he re-entered the grog-shop and imbibed more palm toddy.

It failed to help him. What could he do? He dared not seek the white man's protection, while to remain with Check Lee spelt exile. Had he better flee to the capital? But he had no money of his own, while, even if he could manage to obtain employment in Lakon, a prompt arrest might follow should the lord Cairns suspect him.

Sang Noo's gloomy meditations were broken by the sudden entry of Ah Fong.

"Check Lee wants thee," said the cook shortly.

Sang Noo experienced a strange sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach, but with an effort he braced himself. After all, he had to decide one way or another, and perhaps his best course was to remain with his old master, who could scarcely suspect him of a betrayal that had never taken place. Sang Noo, heartened by the toddy, accompanied Ah Fong down the road.

Check Lee was seated at a table on which were stacks of one-tical notes. These he was tying into bundles to be placed in panniers slung across one of the horses' backs. In the centre of the table an

oil-lamp sent a fitful light through the darkening room.

"Sang Noo will be seated," said Check Lee.

The secretary licked his lips, which had become unaccountably dry. Check Lee spoke again.

"Sang Noo has been absent a long while. If he would explain . . ."

"I drink," answered the secretary, "being grievous because we leave Ban Tern for ever."

Check Lee smiled, and pointed a finger at Ah Fong, who stood at his elbow.

"Behold my new secretary," said he.

"Great One, I do not understand," faltered Sang Noo. "Am I to be cook?"

"Sang Noo, my apologies. I regret I did not make myself clear. I should have said: Behold the man who now combines the duties of both cook and secretary."

"The Great One is pleased to joke," said Sang Noo feebly, and his face was the colour of grass.

"He is not. Now perhaps Sang Noo will tell me why he hid in the jungle near the white man's compound this afternoon?"

"Master, I did wish to see whether the lord Cairns was aware of our departure."

"Sang Noo is indeed careful on my behalf. It is a great pity he is leaving my service."

"Master, I do not understand. . ."

"Now, Sang Noo has served me for long, and the hour for his parting brings me pain. We will therefore drink tea together for the last time. And we will drink a special tea, prepared by Ah Fong to meet the occasion. Ah Fong, bring the tea."

Two cups were placed on the table.

"If the master would drink his first," quavered Sang Noo.

The Chinaman drained his at a gulp, and smiled across the lamp in benevolent fashion.

"The tea is exceeding good," said he. "Sang Noo will never again taste such tea."

Silence mantled the room. Ah Fong stood like a graven image. Check Lee leered. Death stared at Sang Noo from the smooth surface of the tea; it threatened from a thin knife the Chinaman was fingering; it lurked in the grim figure of Ah Fong. For several moments icy fear bound Sang Noo hand and foot. Then a cord seemed to snap in his brain.

In one lightning movement he sprang to his feet. At the same time he heaved with all his might at the table, which crashed over sideways, hurling the oil-lamp and the bundles of ticals on to the floor. A sea of flame washed over the teak boards. A knife whizzed past his head and, quivering, buried itself in the wall. Ah Fong's arms seized him in a terrible grip, but with a backward kick he sent the man flying.

Then Sang Noo, once coward and traitor, ran amok. No longer was he the whining individual of the past: he was a desperate man with the strength of ten. Yelling and screaming, with foam bubbling on his lips, he rushed round the room, upsetting everything that came in his path. The fire! He must feed the fire! In the adjoining store-room he seized a tin of kerosene, ripped out the bung, and returned to the fire. Check Lee and Ah Fong were making frantic efforts to rescue the money. Sang Noo yelled and hurled the tin on to the floor. A white wall of heat rose up with a whirring roar. Blinded and scorched, the others reeled out of the house, leaving Sang Noo alone.

The flames were everywhere now, licking up the walls, stretching eager tongues at the roof overhead, dancing in fantastic wreaths. Sang Noo danced

with them till a gust of smoke caught him in the face and he made for the road outside.

The Chinaman was standing half dazed in the middle of the road. Sang Noo shook his lean fists in Check Lee's face and showered frightful curses upon him and his ancestors; but the Chinaman, as if unable to believe his eyes or ears, stood like a graven image and made no effort to stem the madman's flow of words.

Finally Sang Noo whirled on his heel and rushed through the market-place. He had proclaimed himself a man of deeds at last, and everyone should know it. Holding both arms above his head and screaming his triumph to the stars, he raced along the track, and the villagers, awed by his ghastly face, sprang away from him in terror.

The village faded and the gloomy jungle enfolded Sang Noo. The fit passed and a sudden weakness melted his limbs. He sank down into the damp scrub that bordered the path, and pressed face and hands to the earth. Choking and sobbing, he lay thus for an hour, while the demons of madness gradually disappeared from his fevered brain.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ARREST OF CHECK LEE

FROM his bungalow Cairns saw the red glare in the village below. Fearing that a serious fire had broken out, he ran across the compound, shouting for his coolies to come with him to help the inhabitants. At the gates of the compound, however, a dark-skinned Lao rushed up the hill towards him and salaamed.

"Lord," said he, "the Chinaman's house is on fire and strange things have happened in the village, the like of which I have never heard before."

"And where is Check Lee?"

"Lord, he stands before his burning house like a man who has lost the use of hand and brain."

Richard Cairns stiffened. If it were true that by some strange chance Check Lee had been rendered homeless, what would follow? The man might still have a base of some sort over the border, to which he would probably go. In the absence of the gendarmes, he, Cairns, might, therefore have to take the law into his own hands this very night.

At the thought he drew a deep breath, then ran back to the bungalow for his revolver. As he slid the holster on to his belt, Elise hurried out of the bedroom, where she had been changing her dress for dinner.

"What are you doing?" she asked him anxiously.

"There's a fire in the village, and I'm going down there to see if I can help."

"But why the revolver?"

"There might be looting."

"Can I come too?"

"Of course not. Now, quick: I must go."

Five minutes later Richard was striding through the village. The Chinaman's house was now a fiery sea of flame and past all hope of saving, but luckily the fire had not spread to the adjoining huts, for the thatched coverings were still damp from the rains, and there was no wind to fan the sparks. The villagers were gathered in dozens to watch the scene. They made no move to bring buckets of water from the river, but stood in grim silence. Check Lee had got what he deserved.

Cairns pushed his way through the crowd. Check

Lee, with Ah Fong by his side, was gazing helplessly at the conflagration. Cairns halted within a few paces of the Chinaman, and their eyes met. A stir went round the onlookers and they closed their ranks. Drama had come to the little village of Ban Tern.

Check Lee sucked in his breath, and that strange numbness brought on by the shock of the fire and the madness of Sang Noo left him. His brain cleared, and he saw that he had lost home, money, and all hope to make good with his ancestors. He had nothing more to lose. Check Lee's iron nerve returned. He nudged Ah Fong, his faithful friend.

"Go," he whispered in Chinese. "This matter is naught to do with thee. Seek my community at Canton. Mention me and they will give thee work."

Ah Fong melted in the crowd, and the people made no effort to bar his progress. He was a mere cook; Check Lee was their arch-enemy. Nor did Cairns hinder Ah Fong's departure, for the man was unknown to him. Instead, he gazed steadily at Check Lee. However great the risk, events had forced his hand and Check Lee must be arrested on the spot.

The Chinaman saw the stern blue eyes on him, and he knew that prison awaited him, also dire poverty for as long as he should live. But Check Lee preferred death to prison, and he thanked the spirits of his forebears that he had not aimed a certain little dagger at the traitorous Sang Noo. It still reposed in the folds of his garments, and with it he would send himself and the hated white man to eternity.

Check Lee bowed to Richard Cairns and walked towards him. Cairns stood firmly, with his revolver at the ready, as if expecting to be attacked. The attack came. Check Lee's arm moved like a strik-

ing snake, but the revolver slashed down on his wrist and the dagger tinkled to the ground.

Check Lee was led up to the compound, and the little children spat as he passed. He was taken to the company office and bound securely to a chair. Having locked all the doors and seen that the windows were fastened, Cairns left his Indian watchman to guard the office, and walked into the bungalow to break the news to his wife.

"I've arrested Check Lee," were his first words.

"Dick"—Elise went white to the lips—"I knew you were keeping something back from me."

"Yes, but I had to do it." And he told her of the discovery leading up to the Chinaman's arrest.

"You were right," she said soberly. "It would have been a crime to have let him off. But what are you going to do with him now you've got him?"

"I shall keep him locked up in the office till the police arrive."

"But supposing he escapes in the night. Don't trust him an inch. He's capable of anything."

"I know," said her husband grimly. "I'll take no risks. I'll take turn about with the Indian to guard the place."

"What about the compound coolies? Couldn't they help to watch?"

"No. I don't trust them. They're not accustomed to that sort of job. Besides, they would fall asleep the moment I wasn't looking."

"But couldn't you take Check Lee into Lakon instead of keeping him here?"

"Too risky, I'm afraid. It wouldn't be so easy to guard him on the march. And remember: Sang Noo is still at large. He might try to ambush us on the way, and Check Lee may have other friends, too. No, I'll send a couple of coolies on horseback

into Lakon to-morrow with a report to the police. The gendarmes ought to be here in four or five days' time."

"Do you think the police will take exception to the way you've arrested Check Lee?"

"No: the chief is a friend of mine. Besides, what else could I do?"

"Still, I don't like Check Lee being near us for so long," said Elise anxiously.

"Why not go into Lakon to-morrow, taking the kiddie with you? I'll give you plenty of coolies for the march, and the missionaries can put you up."

"Dick! Can't you see that I'd be much more worried if you were alone?"

"Then what is to be done?"

"Exactly what you've already proposed——" Elise broke off the sentence in quick alarm.

Over the veranda something in the shape of a man was crawling. Its clothing was in tatters, its face was streaked with sweat and dirt, its eyes were glazed, and from its mouth issued hoarse gasps of anguish.

"Sang Noo!" exclaimed Cairns.

"Lord, I die," croaked the figure.

"Elise, the brandy. We've nothing to fear from this creature."

Sang Noo gulped down the spirit. He groaned, shivered, then felt himself all over. Satisfied that he was still in the land of the living, he forced his tongue to speech.

"Lord," said he, "I am afraid of Check Lee, the Chinaman."

"That is strange," answered Cairns, "seeing that he is under arrest in my office."

The effect of these words on the secretary was electrical. He crawled to the white man's feet and

bowed in an ecstasy of gratitude, but Cairns pushed the creature away; the very touch of the man sent shivers down his spine.

"Lord," croaked the secretary presently, "I feared Check Lee because it was I who set his house on fire."

"You did?"

"Lord, being now a man of no abode, and being fearful of heart, I think I tell you all about the Chinaman. Then perhaps you will have mercy upon your humble servant."

"Thou shalt tell me all," replied Cairns sternly, "and leave nothing unspoken."

Thus Sang Noo the Shan related the evil deeds of the Chinaman from the time he had first joined his service. He told every detail, sparing his hearers nothing. By the time he had finished even Richard Cairns was white.

"I can't stand any more," said Elise. "Take that creature out of the bungalow. His very presence is evil."

Richard led Sang Noo down into the compound, where the secretary fell again on his knees.

"Lord, you will not forget me?" he whimpered.

"I shall not," answered Cairns icily. "Thou shalt come with me to Lakon and bear witness against the Chinaman. Moreover, for thy crimes thou shalt be cast into prison also."

"But not the same prison as Check Lee?"

"That will doubtless be arranged."

"The lord is good. Meanwhile, what will Sang Noo do? He has nowhere to sleep, nor has he money with which to buy food."

"Follow me," said Cairns, and he led Sang Noo to the coolie lines.

"Give this person food," Cairns told the head

coolie. "Then let him sleep in the cow-shed. And touch him not, for he is of less caste than the lowliest pariah-dog."

Thus Sang Noo lay amongst the cows. Nor, as Cairns had guessed, did he try to flee, since he preferred prison to solitude.

While Sang Noo blubbered in the straw, Check Lee gazed with unwinking eyes before him. He hated his confinement, he hated Sang Noo, he hated the little children who had spat upon him, but most of all he hated the white lord who had humbled him. These white lords: they stood for everything that he held most in contempt. If he could have had his way, they and all their brood would long ago have been swept from the earth. Check Lee's yellow face twisted with rage, and the veins of his clawed hands stood out in knots. Check Lee, the Chinaman, gave himself up to hatred.

CHAPTER XXVI

POO LORN'S LAST WAR-TRAIL

ON the very day of Check Lee's arrest, Poo Lorn returned to the jungle-people after his long journey to the north. Rumbling his gentle call, he went from hut to hut, but of his little friend there was no sign. The men and women, fearful of mien, stole up to him bearing loads of the choicest jungle-fruit, which they placed reverently at his feet. Then they prostrated themselves many times before him and told him how, four days ago, a large company of human

beings had arrived and surrounded the settlement, giving them no chance to flee. They told him how a white man and a white woman had taken the child though they had battled fiercely to protect it. They hoped their god was not angry with his servants.

All this Poo Lorn heard, but naturally could not understand. Leaving the jungle-people unmolested, he cruised around in the forest, searching for the tiny creature that had become part of his very life. Vast, pathetic, he wandered through the woods, and loneliness went with him.

Presently he struck a trail along which both elephants and men had passed. Poo Lorn, stopping only for brief intervals of sleeping and grazing, followed that trail for over fifty miles. Thirty-six hours after leaving the jungle-people he came upon the bank of the Mae Lang.

He reached the river at midnight. A wind was blowing, and wracks of clouds scudded across the moon. The wan light swept over the waters, whitening them, then plunging them in blackness. A low thunder rumbled round the hills and the lightning flickered.

The trail now swung along the river-path to the right. It led straight towards the village of Ban Tern, and Poo Lorn, being now on familiar ground, rumbled and bubbled with wrath. In the child Poo Lorn saw her mother, with whom he had played in the compound many years ago. To the compound, therefore, the child had gone, and he knew who had taken her thither. It was the hated white man.

Poo Lorn brooded. Firstly, a white man had kept him in bondage for the larger portion of his earlier life. Secondly, a white man had captured his herd. Thirdly, a white man had nearly recap-

tured him after he had gained his freedom. And now the white man had stolen his one friend.

Though these facts went but vaguely through Poo Lorn's brain, and in no particular sequence, the full effect of them was as powerful as if he had reasoned them out in detail; and as the thunder rolled again, but louder this time, he raised his trunk and bellowed back at it. He was mightier than the thunder, for the full glory of his pride and his strength was upon him.

Wild and magnificent, he challenged the universe. He, Poo Lorn the Terrible, was on the war-path again. But now he would leave the village alone; he would go direct to the compound and not only lay waste the buildings, but kill the white man and any other human being he came across. He swung up the path.

A tree, caught by the freshening wind, crashed directly in front of him. Glad to vent his rage on something, he drove his tusks under it and hurled it boldly into the fringing jungle. Two hundred yards farther on, a scent he hated was wafted through the forest. Normally Poo Lorn would have passed by, but now the blood-lust was upon him and he had become a veritable fiend. Mindful of a certain incident that had happened to him when he was eleven years old, he lurched towards the scent.

A deer, drinking in the river that evening, had been slain by a great tiger, which now ate lusciously, cracking the bones with its mighty teeth and licking off the flesh with rasping tongue.

As the vast black shape loomed above it the tiger snarled. Poo Lorn lunged, and the tiger, furious at being disturbed, flashed through the night at its aggressor. Quickly Poo Lorn curled up his trunk for safety, and received the flying death on the points of his sharp tusks. One shake of the head, and

the tiger was hurled through the air, to fall in a sodden ball a few yards from its victim. Poo Lorn trampled it, then returned to the path.

He now no longer trumpeted. Terrific, implacable, he moved silently towards his goal.

CHAPTER XXVII

DEATH IN THE COMPOUND

RICHARD CAIRNS sat outside the office, listening to the thunder rolling on the horizon. Moon shadows chased one another over the lawns. The wind had risen and with every moment steadily increased.

It was the second night of his vigil. In the office, freed partially from his bonds, the Chinaman slept on a camp-bed. In three days' time, Cairns reflected thankfully, the police would arrive and Check Lee would be taken in chains to the capital. A week later the Morrisons should be in Ban Tern, and Elise could either go on holiday with her parents to Bangkok or remain with them in the bungalow, while he himself went into Lakon to arrange about the trial. Events were shaping nicely.

Cairns yawned. He was tired, for the time was two o'clock in the morning, which was the hour when the Indian watchman, who lived in a little hut at the rear of the compound near the border of the jungle, should come out with his gun to relieve him. He, Cairns, had no gun: he trusted to his revolver.

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Cairns glanced at his wrist-watch. Five minutes past two, but no sign of the Indian appearing. He waited another ten minutes, then, judging that the man must have overslept himself, hurried over to the tiny shanty built on tall stilts as a protection from the damp. He climbed up the ladder and creaked over the rickety bamboo flooring. He switched on his electric torch and beheld the Indian fast asleep in one corner. The man's breathing was heavy and stertorous, and Cairns bent and shook him roughly. But the Indian remained wrapped in slumber, and Cairns swore under his breath, for he did not like leaving the office unguarded for even the shortest time. He bent again, made one more effort at rousing the sleeper, then brushed a troubled hand across his forehead. Why should the Indian be sleeping like the dead? This was no normal sleep, he felt sure.

Cairns rayed the torch round the hut. Save for the prone figure and a few cooking utensils, the hut was empty. He stood irresolute for a while, then blinked and rubbed his eyes. The walls of the little shanty appeared to be reeling and swaying, so that his head whirled and a sickness took him in the throat.

What was that? The ladder behind him had creaked. He half turned, but his movements were lethargic. A blow struck him on the head and he pitched forward limply on to the floor.

Ah Fong, late cook of Check Lee, lowered the butt of the Indian's gun. Not for nothing had he hidden, ever since his master's arrest, in the jungle bordering the compound. There he had watched every movement in the company's premises, noting the white man's routine, and he had laid his plans accordingly. He, Ah Fong, was a man of deeds, not words, and his knowledge of the power of yang

bark, together with the hut's being built on stilts, had helped him greatly in his scheme for saving his master.

Removing his head-band, which he had wrapped round his mouth and nostrils, he tore the cloth into strips, which he tied quickly round both men's wrists and ankles. This done, he seized Cairns's belt, on which dangled a bunch of keys; then, carrying the white man's torch and revolver and the Indian's gun, he hastened down the ladder. Though he had breathed in the air of the hut for scarcely a minute, the fumes were already affecting his brain, but a few draughts of the cool wind outside speedily revived him, and he rushed over the lawns to the office.

"Hist!" he whispered through the door. "It is Ah Fong, master."

The Chinaman, who was awake, snapped back directions, and the cook fumbled with the bunch of keys. After trying several in the lock, he found one that fitted. Check Lee was free.

"Thou hast done well, Ah Fong," breathed the Chinaman. "Where is the white man?"

"Master, he sleeps in the watchman's hut, as also does the watchman," answered Ah Fong calmly. "I think I not kill them, for a gun make noise and I lose my knife in the fire. But we have time before us. The yang bark works well."

Check Lee nodded. The yang tree grows all over the Siam Hills, but only the Chinaman and a few of his confederates knew that its bark, when smouldering, gives forth a thin, well-nigh invisible smoke that brings deep sleep when inhaled. The bark had often served Check Lee before, and he therefore wasted no time in further questioning. He snatched the torch from his companion's hand and began to examine the keys. As he fingered the

bunch Ah Fong uttered the longest sentence of his life:

"It all easy," said he. "After dark I creep under the watchman's hut. I leave bark to smoulder so that the smoke go through the cracks in the bamboo floor above. Soon watchman sleep hard and I steal his gun. But I not like to go to office lest the white man see me come. I think I wait. I think white man come presently to the watchman's hut to wake him, and I get him then. And I, Ah Fong, think right."

Check Lee grunted, for now he had the key he wanted. Bidding the other hold the torch, he inserted the key in the office safe. The door, however, refused to swing open. The safe was a combination one, and without the cipher the key was useless. The white man probably carried the secret of the combination in his head, and he now lay unconscious in a tiny hut.

The Chinaman gave way to mad unreasoning rage. He and Ah Fong must flee, penniless and outlawed, into the depths of the jungle, and the lord Cairns would triumph as much as if they had both been cast into prison in the capital.

Check Lee hissed, and swung round to his companion. "Thou sayest that the lord Cairns is alive for sure?" he asked.

"Master, I think he only stunned. I think he live."

"That is good," breathed the other, for he had thought of a revenge that would turn the white man's triumph to dust and ashes in his mouth when he recovered consciousness.

"Ah Fong, thou wilt do anything that I bid thee?"

"Anything, master."

It was strange, this love on the part of the ser-

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vant for his villainous chief. But many years ago Check Lee had saved Ah Fong from a highly unpleasant death, since Ah Fong was a murderer. He had hired false witnesses; Ah Fong had been released, and from then on the murderer had been Check Lee's slave, cook and second shadow.

Check Lee, after hearing Ah Fong's reply, swept the torch along the walls of the office, as if seeking something. Presently his glance fell on a large shelf at one end of the building. On it were several jungle-knives of the kind issued to coolies for forest work. Check Lee selected two of the sharpest. One he handed to Ah Fong, the other he kept for himself. Leaving the firearms behind, he motioned to his companion and crept out of the office. Knives were the best weapons; they struck quickly and in silence.

"Master, we go to the watchman's hut?" whispered Ah Fong.

"We do not," answered the Chinaman tersely.

One hundred yards away was the bungalow in which Cairns's wife and child were sleeping; and a bungalow, as Check Lee well knew, is built open-fashion for the sake of coolness.

Ah Fong grinned, a thin mirthless grin, and the pair slunk over the lawns, across which shadows were flying from the cloud-wracked moon.

They came to within twenty paces of the foot of the steps, and halted to listen. Silence.

"The time is ripe," whispered Check Lee. "Thou fool, why dost thou hesitate?"

But Ah Fong, as if a sixth sense had warned him, had turned and was staring behind him. The moon swung clear of clouds, and on his companion's face Check Lee saw a look of horror, as though the man were gazing upon death. Then Check Lee, too,

looked behind him. His body stiffened and the knife dropped from his fingers. He opened his mouth to scream, but his heart was strangling his throat. Ghosts and devils were abroad in the night and evil had come upon the land.

For, over the lawns and heading straight for the bungalow, a vast black shape was advancing. And it came eerily without a sound. Its body, lit by the moon, lacked colour, so that it appeared even larger than it was. Only the great curved tusks were real, and these gleamed like yellow wands in the sickly light.

Check Lee tried to flee, but he could only stand and stare. The wind sprang up again and hissed over the compound. The grass, lengthened by the recent rains, moaned and bowed. The coco-nut trees threshed their palms and curved their stately stems.

On that wind Poo Lorn caught the scent of the two humans near the bungalow. He knew the scent, recognised it, and perhaps a memory of a pit and days of frightful torture flashed swiftly upon him, for his gait increased and he covered the ground with incredible speed. He muffled over the grass, a vast looming shadow. Under the terrific onrush Check Lee was hurled to earth with a force that broke every bone in his body. Yet he still lived, for by his very speed Poo Lorn had charged over and beyond him. But Poo Lorn turned like a flash and knelt over the fallen man. . . .

Such was the end of Check Lee, the Chinaman.

Poo Lorn raised his great head to see the second human disappear behind a clump of bushes. He swung into his peerless stride, crashed through the bushes, and, though the figure ran fast, soon caught up with it. His trunk, as strong as a live ~~python~~ ^{snake}, came out uncurled. It hit Ah Fong in the

side. Ah Fong fell. The man screamed once, and then a giant forefoot came down.

When Poo Lorn stood up, he threshed his trunk in uncertain fashion. Part of his rage had expended itself, and for the moment the reason for his visiting the compound was forgotten. For a while he swayed, pondering in that strange elephantine way of his; then he remembered. There, blacker than the night, loomed the building in which dwelt his hated enemies.

His great legs stiffened, then flung him forward. His little pig-eyes gleamed red as he thought of the vengeance that would be his.

In the large airy bedroom Elise lay asleep. By the side of her bed the child breathed evenly in its cot. Wind moaned through the shutters and sent cool draughts across the apartment.

Suddenly Elise started out of her sleep and sat upright. She had been dreaming, and through the dream had come so loud a scream that it had awakened her.

She listened intently. But no sound came again, only the wind moaning and sighing. A feeling of uneasiness enveloped her. Pulling aside her mosquito-net, she sprang out of bed, and, drawing back the shutters, looked through the open window. But the moon had clouded and she could make out nothing.

With shaking fingers she lit a candle. Her first glance was towards the cot, where little Elise was sleeping peacefully. Then she looked at her wrist-watch—close on three o'clock in the morning. Her husband should have been back in the bungalow nearly an hour.

Her sense of uneasiness increased. What had kept Dick away, and what was that scream? Ought

she to run over to the office to see if her husband were safe?

She wrapped a light cloak round her shoulders and stood in doubt for a while. Then her eyes dilated with terror. Something had passed across the front of the bungalow and gone round to the side. Though she had been staring at the cot at the time, and had not been looking out of the window, she had felt that presence pass.

Somewhere a clock was ticking with a maddening persistency. She counted the seconds, and after ten had passed a crash jarred the bungalow and the whole building trembled. Silence once more. Then another sickening jolt and Elise heard the deep wrathful bubbling of an elephant.

She sprang to the cot. She did not reason about it: she knew that Poo Lorn the Terrible had come to lay waste the compound a second time, and that death stared her in the face. With the strength of fear, she tore the child from the cot and rushed down the steps into the compound.

She screamed her husband's name and began running with all her might across the grass towards the dim shape of the office, where she judged Richard to be. But the compound was a full two hundred yards in length, with the office almost at the other end of it, and the stables still more distant; and Elise knew that, should Poo Lorn leave the bungalow and give chase, there was little hope.

The moon passed the rim of a cloud and light flooded the compound. Elise glanced over her shoulder. Poo Lorn was pouring over the ground in her wake. Panic seized her. She resolved to tell her child to run on to the office while she sacrificed herself. She swung little Elise on to the ground, but the child had caught its mother's fear and clung to her.

Elise looked backwards again. It was nearly on them now, that great looming death. Neither could escape. As realisation flashed upon her, she played her last card. Pulling the child behind her, she drew herself to her full height and faced the oncoming giant.

"Poo Lorn!" she screamed. "Haouw!"

This was her old command when she wished him to halt. Her voice rang high and clear. Its sound was drowned by one great flaring trumpet. Elise ceased breathing, rocked on her feet. Poo Lorn had halted!

He stood within fifteen paces of her, still fierce and untamable. What had caused him to check in his stride was not the command, but sheer astonishment. For years the men, whether white, black or brown, had fled in terror from his presence, yet here was one small woman challenging his might.

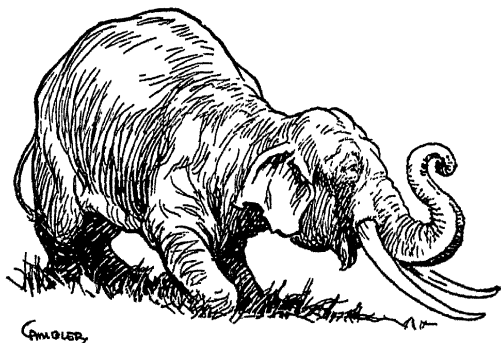
Poo Lorn trumpeted again in his surprise. Then, puzzled and hostile, he advanced a pace. Elise made a superhuman effort to stand her ground and speak to Poo Lorn in the soothing tones she had used to him when she was a girl. As she did so, little Elise moved round from behind her.

Poo Lorn rolled on his feet. There, by the side of the woman, was the small creature he loved. His rage stilled and partial sanity returned. How could he hurt this woman without hurting his tiny friend also? Moreover, what was that voice echoing through his memory?

He towered over the pair. There was the little girl he loved, but with her was someone else of whom he had been fond, and he had thought them to be one and the same.

He advanced a further pace. The woman did not stir, for she knew that her only chance lay in remaining quite motionless. But little Elise, as she

saw the huge form and recognised her friend, threw caution to the winds and began prattling to Poo Lorn in a queer mixture of Lao and some unknown language. Her mother listened as one in a waking dream.



Finally, at the child's shrill command, Poo Lorn knelt humbly upon the ground.

Poo Lorn the Terrible, terrible no longer, had ended his last war-trail.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A REUNION

THE night faded. Dawn paled, and the sun sent shafts of flame over the eastern hills. The heavens turned from a hazy purple to a brilliant blue, for the wind had swept the clouds from the sky. Poo Lorn drank in the coolness of the fair morning and surveyed his domain. Somehow the old familiar sights gladdened his eyes and brought memories of pounded tamarind and the other delicacies which he had received in this very same compound. But in those days he had been man's servant; now he was his conqueror.

The sun flamed brighter and Poo Lorn moved into the shade of a tree. Unmolested, he watched the tiny humans busy themselves on their affairs. From the watchman's hut there came Elise with her husband. He looked pale and ill, and leant on the woman's shoulder. They vanished into the bungalow, which some coolies were shoring up with new posts. Presently more coolies passed Poo Lorn. They kept at a respectful distance, bowed in awe at his gigantic form, and then stooped over two objects lying on the grass. Half an hour later, carrying long boxes on their shoulders, these coolies vanished into the green of the jungle for the burial.

Poo Lorn, too, made for the forest, but in a different direction. He grazed till evening, bathed in the River Mae Lang, then passed through the village of Ban Tern on his way back to the compound. The inhabitants shrank in terror, but a tiny brown piccaninny wallowed in the dust right in Poo Lorn's path. The mother screamed, but the

mite gurgled with laughter and rolled on its back and kicked its legs in the air. Poo Lorn had no quarrel with babes: he carefully avoided it and strode on up the hill to the compound, none hindering him.

He rolled to the bungalow, and humans peered over the veranda at him. They seemed to confer with one another, and Poo Lorn became impatient, for he rumbled and rapped his trunk against the ground.

The parents walked slowly down the steps and led little Elise towards him. Poo Lorn showed no hostility, for the father, if not his friend, was at least no longer an enemy. Like the jungle-folk, he dwelt with and cared for the child.

The man offered tamarind, which Poo Lorn accepted with aloofness. Then the child laughed, and her tiny form was swept into the air. She squealed with delight, and Elise watched her with anxious adoring eyes. Little Elise was replaced on the ground and ran to her mother.

"Dick," whispered Elise, "I believe I understand everything—now."

But Richard Cairns did not reply immediately. He remembered those dreams of his when, years ago, he had set out to capture Poo Lorn the Terrible. Then he had seen visions of tiny hands feeding the pride of Asia with the dainties dear to his heart. Now, perhaps, those dreams would come true, if he could satisfy Government that Poo Lorn had ceased his reign of violence.

"Remember, Elise," he said after a pause, "Poo Lorn has still got a price on his head—at least officially."

"But Government have left him alone since that last raid of his on Lakon. They wouldn't do anything to him now, would they?"

"I don't know, but I do know that while I live I want that elephant to live."

"Poo Lorn," said Elise, "they shan't take you, old chap. And I'd like to cry, if only you'd understand."

But Poo Lorn swung away, for the light was failing and the jungle called. He entered the quiet forest and there grazed and slept at peace. When morning broke he moved slowly in a circular course, going over the old familiar ground where he had toiled in the years of his slavery.

He came to a felling camp, near which tame elephants were rolling the felled logs down the hills. While some of the elephants strove with tusks, trunk and forehead to lever the huge pieces of timber down the slope, others in a tiny creek below were dragging logs over wooden sleepers towards the River Mae Lang. They had chains upon them, and mahouts with goads rode on their necks and urged them forward.

Poo Lorn, who had watched them through a screen of leaves, plunged into full view, as if challenging those mahouts and chainmen to bend him to their wills. The brown men, though many of them had never seen him before, knew him to be the great Poo Lorn, and their faces turned yellow in the sickly jungle light.

The mahouts bowed on the necks of their charges, the chainmen dropped their shackles, and soon a chant rose that proclaimed the wonders of their Lord King. They likened him to a giant, beneath whose mighty tread the earth shakes and at whose voice the heavens tremble and split asunder. The high nasal whine rose and fell through the green jungle walls. Even the tame elephants sensed the eeriness, for they chirruped uneasily and felt the air with nervous wriggling trunks.

Poo Lorn, satisfied that none of those humans threatened him, moved on. He passed other camps, and in all that thousand-square-mile forest he was treated as a god. Yet his chief interest lay, not in the scattered felling camps where he had worked, but in various luxuriant patches of grass where he had fed in the days of old. In these he grazed leisurely, and not until over a week had passed did he return to seek out his little friend.

He rolled through the white gates on a calm sunny evening. There seemed to be a great deal of activity in the compound: coolies were hurrying in different directions, and ponies were being led towards the stables. At his appearance all movement ceased, and a group of white people at the foot of the bungalow steps broke off their conversation and stared at him.

Poo Lorn swung towards the group, and the child and her mother advanced to meet him. He rumbled threateningly, for an old hatred had sprung up in his heart at the sight of one of those white folk—a man, half forgotten and yet familiar, who had returned from the past. . . . Little Elise, borrowing her grandfather's stick, ran to him. As he seemed to ignore her, she promptly lost her temper.

"Kneel," she shrilled at him in Lao. "See thus and thus and thus do I beat thee for being the great pig thou art."

Poo Lorn knelt, for the beating tickled him deliciously and restored his good temper.

Old John Morrison passed a hand across his grey head.

"Can I give him tamarind?" he asked, much as a small boy might have done.

"John, your coming out here has made you quite childish again," said Mary. "I wouldn't think of letting you go near him."

"Come on, Father," called Elise. "We're standing by him, so you will be quite safe."

John Morrison grasped a handful of sticky tamarind, kneaded it into a ball and stretched out one hand. Poo Lorn's wrinkled trunk took the ball disdainfully, as if he suffered this human to approach and do him homage.

John Morrison drew back, but he no longer saw the gigantic figure of Poo Lorn the Terrible. Instead, he saw a tiny cringing butcha that had squeaked with fright and run away from him to the protection of its gentle mother. He saw, too, a hopeless, pathetic little creature, broken in body and spirit after the ordeal of the posts, looking at him as though all interest in life had gone. As he thought of the strangeness and wonder of it all, a lump rose in his throat and his eyes clouded.

Mary took her husband's arm. "Dear," said she, "come on into the bungalow. The excitement has been too much for you."

"It has, thank God," was old John Morrison's queer answer.

CHAPTER XXIX

ENVOI

THERE is an elephant in Northern Siam who is not like other elephants. Though wild, he is often seen in the haunts of man. Sometimes, when the rivers are in flood and the teak logs go booming and crashing round rock-strewn bends, he will plunge into the water and join his tame fellows. No

mahout is on his head, yet for the sheer joy of being able to use the terrific strength that only he can muster he will clear stack after stack of logs, sending the huge baulks of timber riding like matches down the yellow muddy currents. He will not drag a log, however, because to drag means that chains must be put upon him, and this he will never suffer.

There are weeks when he will return to his favourite grazing grounds, but more often than not he will be found in the Ban Tern compound, where a strange sight will be seen. Little Elise has now a small brother, and of an evening, when the sun is mellowing over the world and the screaming flocks of minas and parakeets are flying to their nests, the children will bully Poo Lorn. At their stern orders he kneels, with his hind legs bent and his forelegs out before him. The children play hide-and-seek on either side of his giant body; they tug at his great waving ears; they pound him with their tiny fists; and he, who could slay them with one careless movement, endures it all gladly, for they are his friends. The parents, as they watch the game, take snapshots for the old people in far-away England again.

Though no man can approach unless the children are with him, Poo Lorn is no longer actively hostile to humans. But there is one exception: the cringing Shan secretary. Sang Noo, his period of imprisonment at an end, earns a scanty livelihood by selling chillies and tobacco in the village, and whenever Poo Lorn sees him he chases him. The secretary, pale of countenance and scattering his goods to the winds, flees in terror, and everybody laughs. Even Poo Lorn appears to enjoy the joke, for he never attempts to catch the fugitive and slay him, as he easily could. Thus Poo Lorn the Terrible is

terrible no more. The price on his head has been lifted through representations by Cairns to the Siamese Government, and he remains a god—a god that can be tamed by children.

At times, however, even the children cannot bend him to their wills; this is when that strange instinct for the north assails him. Perhaps the urge comes when they are playing round him. He rises gently and, softly pushing them to one side, makes for the exit of the compound. The children stare after him, and there is mingled sorrow and understanding in their eyes, for they know that Poo Lorn is leaving them for a land beyond their ken.

He strides down the hill to the village. The amber waters of the Mae Lang run sweetly between the cool green fringes of the jungle. Wafts of smoke rise in the quiet air. Meek buffaloes quit their work, and ploughmen sing high whining chants as they walk slowly homewards. The world, mantled in soft beauty, breathes in peace.

Poo Lorn reaches the dusty market-place and the chatter stills. Lean pariah dogs slink between the posts of little huts. Hens flutter across the road, calling their chicks. Pretty Lao girls, lithe and dainty, draw hibiscus blooms from their jet-black hair and throw them down in Poo Lorn's path, while the menfolk bow low, for is not the mighty Poo Lorn using their humble thoroughfare? Only the naked brown piccaninnies show no such reverence. They sprawl and wallow in the dust at Poo Lorn's feet, and with his trunk he tenderly pushes them out of harm's way.

He enters the quiet forest. Monkeys whoop and swing from branch to branch, telling the jungle of his approach; sleepy brown bears dart in terror to their dens; deer stop feeding, lift antlered heads, and with soft frightened eyes scan their green surround-

ings; tiger and panther slink like yellow ribbons through the tangled riot of green. "

All the beasts of the forest give way to Poo Lorn as for fifteen days and nights he travels northwards, stopping only to graze and enjoy the three hours' sleep that is necessary to his kind.

On the sixteenth day he reaches a vast area of thick thorn jungle that stretches over the country like a cloak. Under and through the thorn he urges his huge bulk with ease, and the maze is dim as though a perpetual twilight reigned. He comes to a great wall of rock, some sixty feet high and a mile broad, which lips the edge of the thorn jungle. No man living has been within a hundred miles of it, for it is in the wildest land between the Salween and Mae Kong watersheds.

Poo Lorn halts. Though a silent animal as a rule, he gives forth one great screaming trumpet. Caught up by the barrier of rock, it rolls round and round in stupendous echoes.

They seem to speak, those echoes; they seem to say: "I am Poo Lorn the Terrible. I have fought with man and conquered him, thereby earning my freedom and my right to the burial-place of the wilds."

Gradually the echoes die away. Sometimes he will stay for several days, grazing at leisure. At others, as if satisfied that the locality is as safe and undefiled as when he first visited it, he swings round, and with noiseless tread starts on his long journey back to the humans who are his servants.

For fifty, sixty, even eighty more years he may stay with them; but when the final call tells him his days are drawing to an end, he will return and enter that wilderness for the last time.

In that vast area lie the remains of his ancestors who stalked the earth in the dim bygone ages.

Therefore, guided by the unerring instinct of his race, Poo Lorn the Terrible had fought with the whole of his gigantic strength for the right to die in the place appointed, where neither the hand of man nor the tearing beaks of jungle vultures can disturb his last long rest.

T H E E N D